“At the end of the day, these are just regular people talking about political things.”
- YouTube as a platform for politics.

-A study on how and why young adults use YouTube as a platform to engage with political content, and how that impacts their political identity.

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Abstract

This thesis explores how and why young adults in Norway use YouTube as a platform to engage with political content, and studies how this content and its producers impact their political identity.

A lot has been written and said about YouTube as a political platform; a lot of it negative. YouTube has, among other things, been called “the great radicalizer,” (Tufecki, 2018). Part of my goal with this thesis is to dispel the notion frequently promoted in media that political content on YouTube is an altogether evil that leads to radicalization (Weill, 2018). Instead, I want to show how young adults can use it to create and understand their own political identity.

I recruited young adults, aged 20 to 25, who all described themselves as active watchers of political content on YouTube. I interviewed them all separately over a period of a few months, then analyzed the interviews.

Thirteen interviews were analyzed, in which the informants were asked to talk about their own experiences with YouTube as a platform for political content, why they followed the political YouTubers they did, and how they used the political content they watched.

I wanted to explore how political YouTube could be an arena for young adults to build and better understand their own political identity. Using a reception research approach, I tried to get a better understanding of how the informants interacted with political content, and what uses it had to them. I also explored the informants’ experienced relationship with the YouTubers they watched.

I discovered that young adults have a very varied concept of what a political YouTuber is, as well as a diverse understanding of why they watch political YouTubers. The most common explanation was that politics on YouTube combined entertainment with information in a way that other sources to politics rarely managed. Though a lot of my informants were now active in politics, for many of them YouTube been the entry-point into politics.

YouTube had been an important tool for a lot of my informants in understanding their own political ideologies. By watching political content on YouTube, they could learn about political concepts and ideologies, and they could find political role models. These role models could play a vital part in shaping the informants’ understanding of their own political ideologies and affiliation.

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Part 1: Introduction

1.1: Why study politics on YouTube?

YouTube holds a special place in many young people's hearts. For the last decade it has been the de-facto place to go if you are looking for a video to watch. The platform has become synonymous with watching videos online, whether you are looking for music videos, cooking instructions, or help fixing your computer.

One of the ways in which YouTube differs the most from other social medias and websites is in the way many people talk about the platform; people scroll on Instagram, they swipe on Tinder, browse reddit, and watch Netflix, but we *use* YouTube. From education (Lai, 2013, p. 200-201) to marketing through influencers (Glucksman, 2017, p. 78) to its near infinite library of entertainment content, it has so much more to offer than just being a video-sharing website. For every person, Youtube can be something different, something unique. For young people especially, YouTube is becoming one of their primary sources of information, taking the spot long held by TV (Ipsos, 2021). According to Google's own predictions, by 2025, half the population under 32 will not even subscribe to a pay TV service (Blumenstein and O'Neil-Hart, 2015).

One of the areas of YouTube I find most interesting is politics. For well over a decade, politicians have tried to utilize the platform's potential in their campaigns, with varying degrees of success (Duman and Lochler, 2008). Meanwhile, political content on YouTube has also been at the center of many scandals, being regarded by some as a radicalizer, a dangerous tool used by extremists and far-right hate groups. Following the 2016 presidential election in particular, the combination of social media and politics got a reputation for driving young people towards fringe political ideologies.

I therefore think it is important to study *how and why* young adults use YouTube to interact with political content and try to get a clearer picture of what it means to them. In today's highly mediated society, people can choose from a plethora of sources to attain political information or news. Why would so many then choose YouTube?

In this thesis I will be analyzing thirteen interviews I have conducted with young adults who actively follow political content creators on YouTube. Utilizing a reception research approach, I have sought to better understand how and why they use YouTube for political content the way they do why they choose the platform over traditional media outlets for political content, and how it affects their personal political identity.

I also desire to showcase political YouTube as more than a radicalization hotspot, by giving

a voice to those who use YouTube for political content on a daily basis, and hopefully provide a more complete image of what political YouTube actually is.

1.2: Research question

My goal with this thesis is, by using qualitative interviews and a reception research approach, to answer my main research question: **how and why do young adults use YouTube as a platform to engage with political content, and how does YouTube impact their political identity?** YouTube has become a large part of many young adults' media consumption, replacing many other sources for both information and entertainment (Ipsos, 2021). It is a media platform that is constantly changing, continuously offering new arenas to be researched. One such arena is the political, which young adults may use to both learn about political concepts and help understand their own position in the political landscape, an important keystone in building one's own identity. However, politics on YouTube plays by different rules than politics in the offline world (see chapter 2.3) Therefore, people who follow politics primarily on YouTube might develop a different relationship towards politics than those who follow it through traditional media channels.

Over the years, YouTube has been rightfully criticized for catering to and hosting content with extreme views, particularly in the form of right-wing content (see for example Lewis, 2019). And although it was not my intention to paint a glorified picture of politics on YouTube, I wanted to explore other avenues for using YouTube for political content. My intention is to give a voice to those who actively use YouTube for political content, so we can better understand why they make the media-choices they do.

In order to do this, I have explored several areas of young adults in Norway's use of YouTube as a platform to engage with political content. I have looked at how my informants use YouTube, how they consider politics on YouTube to be different from traditional politics in the offline world, and why do they choose YouTube as a platform for political content. I have also looked at what they feel they get from interacting with political content, what uses the political content has for them, and how it helps them create and better understand their own political identity.

My hope was that by researching these areas I could provide the reader with a better understanding of how and why YouTube is used as a platform for politics and display how it might help young adults better understand the world of politics. But first, a quick history lesson on what YouTube is:

1.3: What is YouTube?

A technology that appears suddenly and has a major impact on society is called a "disruptive innovation." Examples include how social media changed human interaction, or how cellphones made us always connected (Rahman, Hamid, Chin, 2017, p. 111). The internet itself was a disrepute innovation (Ibid, 115), altering how we communicate as a people, while also spawning several new disruptive innovations of its own. One of them was YouTube.

YouTube, launched in 2005, has grown to become the most popular site for video content on the web, as well as the second most visited website in the world. Created by three former PayPal employees to be a site where people could easily share videos with each other, the site grew popular at record pace, and was purchased by Google for $1.6 billion less than a year after it went online (Exford, 2016). As audience members grew, so did the possibility for ad revenue, and for content creators to make a living off the site (Ibid). As it grew in popularity, it also became more technologically advanced, pushing its way into different market areas.

In Norway today, 63% of men aged 18-29 use YouTube daily, while the number for women in the same age group is 45%. With 66% of the Norwegian population aged 18-29 having a YouTube account, it is the fourth most popular social media among young adults in Norway, beaten only by Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat (Ipsos, 2021). Meanwhile, Norwegians in the relevant age group's use of traditional media is steadily declining: only 35% of people aged 20 to 24 report watching TV during on an average day in 2019 (Medienorge (1)), while the numbers for the same people with newspaper subscriptions are down to 15% in 2019, an all-time low (Medienorge (2)).

Recently, YouTube has started challenging the established media on several platforms: in 2016, Google released an analysis showing how online advertising gave higher returns than TV advertisements in 80% of cases, pointing in particular to online video as the most effective marketing tool (thinkwithgoogle.com, 2016). In the buildup to the 2016 US presidential election, from April 2015 to March 2016, more than 110 million hours of content related to either candidates or political issues had been watched on YouTube, with nearly 60% of the watch time coming from people aged 35 or younger (Andrews, 2016). Already in 2009, YouTube was prophesized to expand further into domains like "online television watching, real-time politics, and viral videos" (Gannes, 2009, p. 153)

The majority of the content uploaded on YouTube is still produced by independent content creators (Saastad, 2020, p. 6), commonly referred to as "YouTubers," as opposed to traditional media outlets, where the content producers are media companies. This means the power dynamic between viewer and uploader is different. Since people generally prefer those

who are “like themselves” (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 126), this could mean young adults are more likely to seek out political YouTubers who remind them of themselves, or who they want to be (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 25-26). I was therefore curious to see if this might result in closer bonds between viewers and the YouTubers they watched, drawing on Horton and Wohl’s (1997) theory on parasocial relationships.

1.4: Negative aspects of YouTube as a platform for political content

There are a few worries about YouTube as a platform for political content. One such issue that must be addressed is the possibility for people to end up in echo chambers. In an echo chamber, people constantly have their own view of the world confirmed and repeated back to them. Among Norwegian adults who followed politicians on social media, three fifths reported only following politicians they agreed with (Aalen, 2015, p. 224). What is worrisome about echo chambers is that people will not have their opinions challenged and might develop more extreme views, which only leads to further polarization, a serious threat to democracy (Ibid). In 2017 Cass Sunstein wrote about how the US had seen an explosion in “partyism,” in which people become increasingly tied to their political parties, which ties up democratic processes and makes it harder for politicians to work with politicians from other parties (Sunstein, 2017, p. 10). Daniel Kress likened it to following a sports team, saying “political ideologies or policies at stake are largely unimportant for most Americans compared to the success of the teams they affiliate with” (Three Arrows, 2018)

Sunstein points to how echo chambers can make people believe in falsehoods, as we saw in the “Brexit” campaign (Sunstein, 2017, p. 11). While people do not intentionally seek out echo chambers, we have a tendency to seek out information we agree with, and we are given the option to filter away what we do not like (Ibid, p. 5). For YouTube and other social media, the site’s structure can be an important factor in preventing filter bubbles and echo chambers. By exposing the viewers to content they would not seek out on their own, Sunstein says we can create something akin to a real-world social experiences, where we are more often forced to deal with diverse ideas (Ibid, p. 13).

Another worry is the globalizing effect YouTube can have on the world. Globalization means that non-western societies are increasingly pushed towards western societal ideals (Schwebs, Ytre-Arne, Østbye, 2020, p. 30). Particularly American views and values are likely to be spread across borders thanks to global networks. People who consume most of their political news from online sources, like YouTube, runs the risk of knowing more about American politics than their own country’s politics.

Marshall McLuhan coined the term the "Global Village" to explain the cultural convergence taking place. The idea is that, thanks to the incredible speed information travels thanks to new media (McLuhan came up with the concept in 1964 and was primarily concerned with the radio and TV), people from all over the world now share the same experiences and events. Some of the earliest examples of this included the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the moon landing, and later also what professor Mirzoeff calls "ritualized events," like the Oscars and major sporting events (Mirzoeff, 2015, p. 146-148).

When a YouTuber uploads a new video, a notification is sent out to their followers, who can tune in to watch the video together, no matter where they are in the world. This way, people feel like they are part of a society of people, despite having never interacted with them in real life. This can lead to polarization (Sunstein, 2017, p. 75), and create imagined communities across global borders, causing people to feel that the politics discussed on YouTube is highly relevant for them, because it affects their community (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 18).

1.5: This thesis' structure

In part 2 I begin by presenting a brief criticism of previous research done on YouTube as a platform for political content. Then I present the field I have studied and the theories and studies I have used to answer my research question. This will be divided into three different categories, based on how it relates to political content on YouTube. Those three categories are: theories regarding civic duty, theories on the intersection between entertainment and education, and theories regarding the relationship and identity building.

In part 3 I describe the writing process of this paper. I explain my choice of method, explain the structure of my interviews, and give a quick rundown of the recruitment process.

In part 4 I analyze the interviews and present my findings. This part is divided into seven parts, with each part focusing on a different theme from my interviews.

In part 5 I discuss my findings from part 4. I discuss the possibility that YouTube is making politics too fun and that it might not lead to further political action, how YouTube's political content is more than just far-right content, the role parasocial relationships play when it comes to young adults' experiences with political YouTubers, and how political content on YouTube might be helping young adults to better understand their own political identity.

Finally, in part 6, I have, to the best of my ability, answered my research question.

Terminology explanation

Patreon: a person who donates an amount of money to a content creator to help support their work through websites like patreon.com. Often the patreon will receive some form of benefit for being a patreon, like access to exclusive chat channels or being able to watch new videos earlier than the rest of the audience.

BuzzFeed-feminism: an expression used in certain circles on the internet, describing a certain understanding of or branch of feminism. Typically, when someone talks about BuzzFeed-feminism, they mean concepts like “mansplaining” (when a man explains something to a woman in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing) or “manspreading” (when a man sits in a public space with his legs wide apart, taking up more space than some consider necessary). BuzzFeed-feminism is often considered to be “the bad side of feminism”, or to give other feminists a bad name.

SJW: Social Justice Warrior. Although some people on the left will use it to describe themselves as someone who fights for equality and social justice, it is a common derogatory term used by people on the right to discredit someone on the left.

Deplatform: preventing someone from posting their content on your platform. Donald Trump was deplatformed when he was banned from Twitter and most other social media in late 2020.

Part 2: Theory

2.1: Past research on political YouTube

Research on YouTube as a platform for political content has largely been focusing on the negative aspects. This is not without reason. Throughout the years there have been several acts of domestic terrorism carried out by people who were radicalized online, partially via YouTube. For example, in 2019 Brenton Tarrant killed fifty-one people when he attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The link between Brenton and YouTube was obvious; while livestreaming his attack, just prior to opening fire, Tarrant said "subscribe to PewDiePie," referencing a popular YouTube meme at the time. PewDiePie, or Felix Kjellberg, immediately responded by saying that he was "absolutely sickened having my name uttered by this person" (Dickson, 2019). A New-Zealand report concluded that Tarrant had been radicalized primarily thorough YouTube (Shead, 2020).

PewDiePie himself has been the target of a lot of criticism for his seemingly lax relation to the alt-right, and for what some have called "flirting with, if not endorsing, the alt-right neo-Nazi movement and antisemitism." Just a few months before the Christchurch attack, PewDiePie had been, justifiably, criticized for endorsing the channel "E;R," whose content is a mix of media criticism fueled by antifeminism, anti-multiculturalism, and antisemitism. This was just the latest in a long line of scandals that had surrounded the Swedish superstar the last few years (Dickson, 2019).

PewDiePie gave an interview to the New York Times podcast "Rabbit Hole", who focuses on online radicalization. PewDiePie explained that he was not trying to incite any form for political uprising one way or the other, that his goal is merely to entertain people, and that people were trying to use him as a symbol for something that he is not (Roose, Mills, 2019).

It is important that this sort of content is criticized. As YouTube is an extremely disruptive media, it is necessary to try and map the potential negative effects it might have on people, and since it is more popular with young people than older (Ipsos, 2020), it is important to hold those who upload their content on the site to a high standard, as they can be important characters for young people building their own identity (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 26).

One of the most referenced and influential scientific studies done on YouTube in recent years is Rebecca Lewis' "Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube," which has set the tone for much of the research and conversations on the topic after it came out. Lewis "analyzed both the content of YouTube influencers (that is, what they are saying) as well as their collaborations (who they are broadcasting with)" (Lewis, 2018, p. 6), which resulted in a map that shows how YouTubers on the right were all connected in a

large network Lewis calls the “Alternative Influence Network.” She describes the network as “an assortment of scholars, media pundits and internet celebrities who use YouTube to promote a range of political positions, from mainstream versions of libertarianism and conservatism, all the way to overt white nationalism. Content creators in the Alternative Influence Network claim to provide an alternative media source for news and political commentary. They function as political influencers who adopt the techniques of brand influencers to build audiences and “sell” them on far-right ideology” (Lewis, 2018, p. 1).

The biggest takeaway from the report was how following a seemingly innocuous channel, or one that you would not necessarily think of as political, like Joe Rogan, would trigger YouTube’s algorithm to show you content made by other channels within the network. In just a few clicks you could go from watching someone like Chris Ray Gun talk about video games, to watching the white nationalist Richard Spencer talk about the “Great replacement.”

It was YouTube’s recommendation algorithm that was given the blame for why the site so easily could lead someone down a path of increasingly radical content. Ribeiro et.al performed a large-scale, quantitative study, which did show that users typically did migrate from milder content, media criticism and “alt-light,” to more extreme channels, the “intellectual dark web” and “alt-right” (Ribeiro et.al., 2020).

What I have found lacking in these studies is a more comprehensive view of YouTube as a platform for political content. There has been too much focus on what the media might do to people, and too little on what people do with the media. It is understandable that journalists, to whom sensationalism might be more important, will focus on the more extreme cases; New York Times has called YouTube both “the Great Radicalizer” (Tufecki, 2018) and “the New Far-Right Talk Radio” (Herrman, 2017), but this attitude of presenting YouTube as a tool for radicalization is also present in studies where it feels less natural. Maddox and Creech’s (2020) article on the YouTuber “ContraPoints” exemplifies this: even though the paper acknowledges that ContraPoints’ content’s main purpose is anti- or deradicalization (p. 9), it also makes sure to point out that ContraPoints might also end up radicalizing her own viewers, only in the opposite direction (p.11), and that she has been criticized by the Anti-Defamation League for her sarcastic use of the term “reptiles,” which they claim is an anti-Semitic trope (p. 15). However, those familiar with not only ContraPoints, but also the “internet lingo” she uses in her videos to reach out to her fans and those critical of her, will recognize her use of the term “reptiles” as a reference to the popular, (mostly) ironic, internet conspiracy theory that the world is secretly controlled by lizard people. Baym says we use

language to form “speech communities” of shared communication practices and distinctive patterns of language use, which enact and recreate a culture ideology that underpins them. Different online groups will have different in-jokes to help differentiate those who are “in” from those who are not (Baym, 2015, p. 86). On YouTube, this manifests itself in the form of channel- or community-specific running jokes and self-referential memes. To research a specific group’s practices, you need to understand the way they communicate. ContraPoints herself has said “Sometimes, the best way to understand a person’s world is to learn their language” (Contrapoints, 2018). You need to understand the language of your subject first, or you will end up with situations like the one where PewDiePie is called alluded to as a Nazi, because his “edgy jokes” were misinterpreted by the Wall Street Journal (Winkler, Nicas, Fritz, 2017), which only serves to take focus away from actual problems the site has.

Finally, it must also be mentioned that YouTube has made great strides towards combating hate speech, racism, and extremist content on their site. Jigsaw, a unit within Google whose task it is to combat extremist content across Google’s many platforms and “explore threats to open society” (jigsaw.google.com, 2021), released a report listing all the efforts they had taken over the recent years to make YouTube a more inclusive, less radical and extreme place. Already in 2017 YouTube took action to decrease the amount of radical content on their website. Videos with supremacist content had their recommendations limited and features like commenting and sharing were disabled. According to Google’s own numbers, this reduced the total amount of views these videos got by 80 percent (jigsaw.google.com, 2020). In 2019 YouTube updated their hate speech policy, prohibiting content that “alleges one group is superior in order to justify discrimination based on qualities like race, religion, or sexual orientation” (ibid). As a result, thousands of videos were removed all together. They also introduced a three-strike system, where if a channel broke a new rule policy three times after it had been introduced, the channel was deleted all together. This resulted in the deletion of channels hosted by several white supremacists, including former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke. By the second quarter of 2020, more than 80.000 videos had been removed from the platform (ibid). Over time, this crackdown on right wing extremist content has started to have a positive effect for YouTube, as far-right content creators and their followers have had to move off the most popular platforms, to less moderated sites willing to host their content (Grisham, 2021).

It is important to remember that Google having the final say in what is and what isn’t acceptable content in terms of political discourse might not be a good long-term solution. Due

to the way the company is structured, the CEOs have nearly complete control over all decision making, and the public is simply asked to trust that Google will do what is right and good for them (Zuboff, 2019, p. 101). Can we trust global tech giants to dictate what we get to see, and what should be kept from us?

It must also be noted that the change in YouTube's policies have hit a lot of content creators' wallets. When YouTube started to crack down on channels with content they deemed problematic, the term "Adpocalypse" was created; many content creators found that their content was no longer getting approved to have ads run before it, which severely disrupted the income of certain content creators. Political YouTubers were hit particularly hard, as their content often covered more controversial topics (Van Natta, 2020, p. 12)

Before looking at the theoretical background for this thesis, let us first establish what the political YouTube community is, and how it operates:

2.2: What is political YouTube?

Political YouTube is loosely connected network of YouTubers making content for YouTube, with a focus on politics. They come in a great variety of people and political stances, something I have explained in more detail below.

In his 2020 thesis paper, Saastad did extensive research on political YouTubers, focusing on the rhetorical techniques they used when communicating with their audiences. He found that whether or not they tried to reach an audience who agreed with them, they addressed their audience in a respectful manner, though several would use comedy to enhance the entertainment value of their videos (Saastad, 2020, p. 79).

Saastad found that the most common type of content was response videos, in which the YouTuber would respond to something else that had happened in the world of media, either from a different YouTuber, or something outside of YouTube. Unlike actual politicians, who primarily speak deliberatively, political YouTubers speak forensically, attempting to refute the oppositions claims and opinions. (Ibid, p. 80). The reason might be found in the highly polarized network that is political YouTube, in which group identity and belonging (Sunstein, 2017, p. 75) is a vital factor for the YouTubers.

The political content on YouTube is geared towards a younger audience, which is reflected in how it is presented, and in the content they cover. Since they (usually) do not have to answer to any newsroom editor or need to worry about "electability," they can cover political topics most mainstream media outlets will not touch. This is both a strength and a weakness,

as political YouTubers are not held to the same standard when it comes to ensuring the information they distribute is correct. (Saastad, 2020, p. 82).

In preparation for my interviews, I watched a large amount and a wide variety of content uploaded by political YouTubers. I found that the content they create usually serve one of three functions:

1: It seeks to win debates over political opponents, often in the form of back-and-forth response-counterresponse videos.

2: It seeks to share opinions on subjects or educate an audience on a particular subject.

3: It rides a wave of popular content. As political YouTubers are still YouTubers, YouTube is for them a job. Popular content generates views, which in turn generates revenue.

2.3: What is a political YouTuber?

It is important to be clear on what exactly a "political YouTuber" is. A YouTuber is someone who uploads video content to the platform YouTube. Therefore, it is easy to think that a political YouTuber is someone who uploads political content to YouTube. However, it does happen that channels that are usually apolitical stumble their way into political YouTube. It happened in 2017 when gaming YouTuber "JonTron" had a debate with left-wing YouTuber "Destiny" over his views on immigration (Good, 2017), before never using his channel to discuss politics again. Then, at the start of 2020, Jenna Nicole Mourey, or "Jenna Marbles" became a topic of discussion on political channels after an old video of hers surfaced, in which she was accused of doing blackface. Mourey apologized and has since withdrawn from the platform altogether (thisvideoisback, 2020).

I would not consider neither JonTron nor Jenna Marbles of being political channels or belonging to political youtube. Instead, I have defined a political YouTuber as: **a political YouTuber or political YouTube channel is someone whose biggest claim to fame is their presence on YouTube, and who devote a large part of their channel to either discussing political topics, be they social, legislative, or economic, or who tries to educate their audience on political matters of any type.**

By this definition, channels like "LastWeekTonight", with over 8.5 million subscribers at the time of writing, is not a political YouTube channel, because the channel's content is made for and airs on TV. Meanwhile, someone like The Young Turks, who makes content that imitates a TV-show, is a political YouTube channel. This brings us to the different types of political channels found on the website.

2.4: The different types of political YouTubers

Political YouTube channels come in a wide variety, both in terms of the people making them, and in terms of the genre of content they create. The different genres help set the terms for their content and helps separate them from other types of content (Kjeldsen, 2017, p. 94). Saastad (2020, p. 28) divided political YouTubers into two main categories, "industry imitators" and "everyday/common/casual" (hverdagslige). While I agree with Saastad on the distinction, I have chosen to refer to them as either "Austere" or "Casual" channels.

2.4.1: Austere channels

The Austere channels imitate traditional media. The channels are often, but not always, centered around a specific individual. The main difference between an Austere channel and a Casual channel is the presentation and style of their content.

The Austere channels have higher production value than the average Casual channel, relying on sets that imitates a Radio or TV show, and have a more formal presentation than the Casual channels.

Austere channels come in a wide variety. For example, The Rubin Report imitates a political talk show, inviting other YouTubers as well as top politicians to come on his show. Joe Rogan uploads video versions of his podcasts (radio show made available through the internet), in which he often talks with several prominent figures from the political YouTube community. Ben Shapiro and Secular Talk host one-man talk shows, where they share their views and opinions on current political topics. There is a varying degree in how much the sets resemble that of a real TV-show, but the overall aesthetic is closer to that of a TV-show than most of their Casual counterparts. For convenience's sake, I would also place the channels that *are* TV-shows, like John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight" and "Spitting Image," into this category, even though I do not consider them to be political YouTubers.

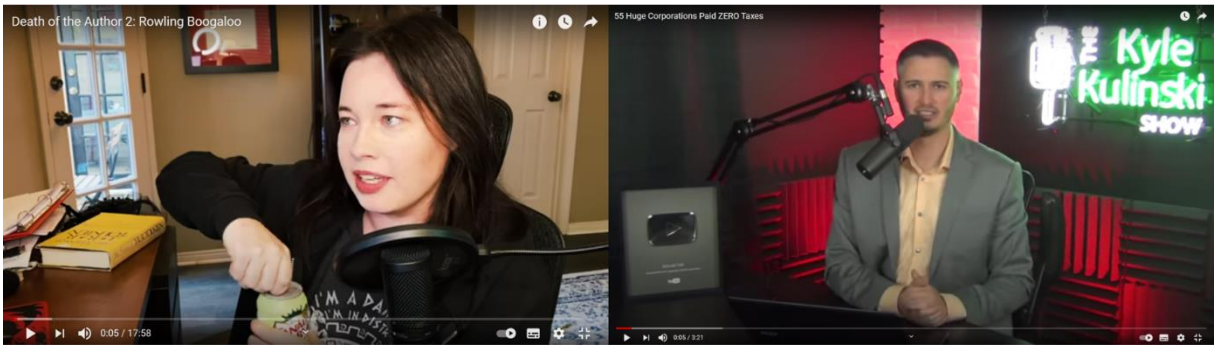
2.4.2: Casual channels

The Casual channels are more varied than the Austere channels as far as content is concerned. A Casual channel's style of video is reminiscent of traditional YouTube videos; these are channel that embody YouTube's slogan "broadcast yourself." The YouTubers are more regularly at the center of their own videos, and often it is their opinion that matters.

By "casual" I do not mean to imply that these channels do not take their job seriously, or that a lot of effort is not put into their video, but the overall mannerism is more casual than their counterparts.

The Casual channels' variation comes from the different tones and styles they employ, as well as the enormous differences in production quality. In this category we find smaller

channels like CopsHateMoe, Curio, and Jellybean Gen, whose content is primarily the "YouTuber turning on a camera and performing a script, shot from within their own home" - type of videos. We also find some of the larger channels, like ContraPoints and Philosophy Tube, whose hyper-stylized production make t hem stand out from several others from the same category, but whose channels main focal point is still the YouTuber themselves. They will often utilize a lot of humor, be self-referential and self-deprecating, creating closer, more personal ties between YouTuber and viewer.



Picture 1: screenshot from Lindsay Ellis' video "Death of the Author 2: Electric Boogaloo". Ellis can be seen opening a beer, dressed casually, sitting in a messy room (source: Lindsay Ellis, 2020).
Picture 2: Screenshot from Secular Talk's video "55 Huge Corporations Paid ZERO Taxes". Kyle Kulinski is wearing a suit, sitting in a studio (Source: Secular Talk, 2021).

Separating channels between Casual and Austere can be challenging. The main difference often comes down to the width of their appeal: Austere channels will often appeal to a wider audience outside of YouTube, since their content has fewer inside jokes and does not rely on the viewer being as familiar with internet culture and lingo to follow along. The austerity goes beyond simply what is shown on screen, and will extend to other social media, like twitter. Casuals are less constrained by a need to act in a professional manner and will often express themselves in more familiar terms than their Austere counterparts.

2.5: The two major political networks:

To understand the political aspect of YouTube, it is important to understand how the network operates. Rebecca Lewis' 2019 report on the right-wing "alternative influence network" gives a good overview of the channels found in the right-wing network, but very little work has been done to map out the left-wing. Among the most extensive is Kuznetsov and Ismangil's analysis of BreadTube, a cooperative network of left-wing YouTubers. Their study looks at four content creators from the left and describe the function and inner workings

of the network. They describe it as “a loose association of independent online videographers and their surrounding communities that makes up a leftist response to alt-right use of digital media,” and say that BreadTube “is a form of digital praxis promoting new types of digital engagement with leftist and socialist thought” (2020, p. 204-205). Beyond that we mostly have to rely on individual studies on YouTubers, like Maddox and Creech’s paper on ContraPoints (2020).

I therefore want to provide the reader with a quick overview of how the two networks work, and how they play off each other.

2.5.1: The right

The right-wing network grew in popularity around the presidential US election of 2016, as more and more people flocked to YouTube to watch videos about the candidates (Andrew, 2016). Politics on YouTube was at the time (and still is) deeply concerned with Culture War issues. The right had taken a firm stance against “cancel culture” or “Politically correct culture,” which culminated in a now infamous event that took place at UMASS called “The Triggering, Has Political Correctness Gone Too Far?”

The event hosted three right-wing guest speakers: author and professor of philosophy Christina Hoff Summers, journalist and self-described provocateur Milo Yiannopoulus, and Steven Crowder, who is most famous for being the host of the YouTube channel “StevenCrowder.” The debate, which lasts for an hour and a half, is disrupted throughout its entire runtime by members of the audience wo are attending the event explicitly to heckle, refute and shout down the people on stage (MILO).

In the aftermath, the right-wing managed to assert itself as the voice of calm collected reason, while the left was ridiculed and presented as “triggered leftist snowflakes” (Nagle, 2017.)

The YouTube conservatives were not the stereotypical “middle aged white men” people associate with the right-wing (Udolf, 1973, p. 278-279), but instead cool and energetic people young adults could relate to. People like Canadian reporter Lauren Southern who “stood up to” feminism (Rebel News, 2015), Ben Shapiro, a Harvard graduate with a sharp tongue (Daily Wire, 2019), and Paul Joseph Watson, who was not afraid to say what was on his mind (Paul Joseph Watson, 2016). These three, and many other, laid politics out in simpler terms that was much easier for young people to digest and understand.

2.5.2: The left

The left was off to a slower start than the right but would eventually find a format and style that captivated people. The largest channel on the right, ContraPoints, run by trans-woman Natalie Wynn, was created as a response to the growing network of right-wing YouTubers. As YouTube gradually demonetized or deleted many right-wing extremist channels, her content became more focused on providing counterpoints to the alt-right as a whole (Maddox and Creech, 2020, p. 6). She describes herself as "a politically opinionated trans woman who publicly transitioned while making anti-fascist content on a notoriously right-wing platform" (ContraPoints, 2020).

ContraPoints is friends and works closely with several other prominent characters in the left-wing sphere of political YouTube: there is for example Harris Brewis, host of the channel "hbomberguy." Like ContraPoints, he specializes in debunking and refuting the right's theories and opinions. "hbomberguy" often makes videos in which he calls out other political YouTubers, a style of video I shall be referring to as "hit-pieces."

Wynn, Brewis, and most political content creators benefit greatly from a reciprocal relationship between the right and left on YouTube. There exists a sort of attack-counterattack mentality between the two factions (Saastad, 2020, p. 65), a constant struggle to assert one's dominance over the other and to claim cultural gemstones for their own side in the ongoing Culture War (see chapter 2.10). A recent example of this took place during the summer of 2020, when a series of tweets made by Harry Potter-author J. K. Rowling (Rowling, 2020) in response to an article using the phrase "people who menstruate" (Sommer, Kamowa, Mahon, 2020) sparked a debate within the larger political community on YouTube, creating a back-and-forth between the left-wing youtuber Lindsay Ellis (2020) and right-wing youtuber Carl Benjamin (Akkad Daily, 2020 (1) (2)). In these back-and-forths, the political YouTubers are not addressing each other as much as they are addressing each other's audiences, possibly in an attempt to win them over to their side (Saastad, 2020, p. 65-66).

2.5.3: Centrists

There are definitive benefits to being part of either the right-wing or the left-wing communities if you are a political YouTuber; from having a large community of content creators to cooperate with, to having an easier time finding new material to make content about. Still, there are a few YouTubers who label themselves as either politically neutral or as a centrist, but often these will still be classified as either right or left by the community at large. Take for example Christopher Raymond Maldonado, or "ChrisRayGun" as he is known on YouTube. Maldonado self-describes as a liberal centrist who makes "political commentary

videos that focus on the regressive left and social justice warriors," which is a common trait among rightwing YouTubers. He also lists "gamergate" as the reason he got into political commentary in the first place (The Rubin Report, 2016).

Gamergate is a Culture War signpost battleground, where who you choose to stand with, gamers or journalists, will position you either on the right or the left side of political YouTube. To Maldonado, Gamergate was an event where "we found out a bunch of different things about a lot of collusion and corruption in the gaming industry, specifically in the gaming press" (The Rubin Report, 2016). This, combined with his firm stance against the "regressive left," "social justice warriors," and continued ridicule of "the triggered" (Chris Ray Gun, 2016) and close professional relationship with several prominent figures on the right, makes it difficult to argue against Maldonado belonging on the right side of the political spectrum, where Lewis places him in her study (Lewis, 2018).

Though there certainly are channels that present themselves as centrists and who promote centrist views, they are usually rather small and vastly outnumbered by channels who are aligned with one of the two major political camps.

2.6: Three theoretical approaches for why people turn to YouTube for political content

The studies I have covered below include both studies I read before and after conducting my interviews. They have been grouped into three major categories, based on three different approaches to why people might use YouTube as a platform to interact with political content. The first category, civic duty, contains papers and theories on why people might feel it is important to be politically active and informed. The second category is about the intersection between entertainment and information. These are theories regarding how entertainment can be used to communicate information, and texts that try to explain why the informant might be interested in the particular brand of politics present on YouTube. The third category is about identity and relationships. They are used to explore how the informant might develop their political identity through YouTube, but also how they might develop relationships towards the YouTubers they follow, or the wider community surrounding them

But first, I want to explain what I mean by "politics" in this thesis, and give a quick introduction to the normative ideal citizen.

2.7 :What is politics?

Politics has been attempted defined many times throughout the years. Harold Lasswell simplified it down to "who get what, when, and how" (Dryzek, Honig and Phillips, 2011, p. 5), in which the "what" is everything from financial goods to rights. Weber said it

"encompassed many types of independent leadership functions," like foreign policy, banks, unions and so on, and defined it as "the leadership or influence exercised by leaders of a political organization; in other words, of a state" (Waters, Waters, 2014).

When I speak of politics in this thesis, I mean the broader concept of politics, both as a field that employs politicians, as people's own personal beliefs, and as a vital function of society. Speaking with my informants, I never asked them to define what politics means to them or how they would define it. From the interviews, it seemed like they drew a clear distinction between politics as something that concerned the public, as opposed to the private life: politics exists primarily in the public sphere.

The public sphere is the place where the public can share their opinions and hold those in power accountable (Gripsrud, 2017, p. 8). Coined by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, inspired by Hannah Arendt's writings, the public sphere was the place where ideas were meant to come together and be discussed, and where the "winner" would be the one with the best arguments (Ibid, p. 8).

Habermas' ideal world of discursive politics might not have come into fruition, but the introduction of the internet left some hopeful of a new digital era for the public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 9).

2.8: The informed citizen ideal

The normative ideal when it comes to civic duty is the "informed citizen." Moe Et Al. (2019. p. 13) describes the ideal as "citizens having a certain amount of knowledge about political actors, about their policies and about contemporary political matters. This orientation towards society allows the citizen to make their own informed decisions and be able to back it up." The issue with the ideal is that it demands too much of citizens; yes, a democracy needs citizens who are informed to a degree, but it is unrealistic to expect citizens to be fully informed on all matters of importance at all times (Moe Et al., 2019. p. 13).

Therefore, several other ideals have been presented as a more feasible alternative to the informed citizen ideal. For example, Schudson, in his book "The Good Citizen" presents the idea of a "monitorial citizen," a citizen who is not concerned with everything that goes on in politics at all times, but is aware of the major events, and is ready to spring into action if need be (Schudson, 1998, p. 310). Zaller presents a similar ideal, with his "burglar alarm" system, which relies on the media to inform the citizens when it becomes necessary for them to take action (Zaller, 2003, p. 110). In systems like these, citizens rely on a division of labor, in which the task of gathering and presenting important information is outsourced to members of

the media, who are tasked with "ringing the alarm" if something noteworthy happens (Song, Zúñiga and Boomgaarden, 2020, p. 51).

What all of these have in common is that they allow for the citizen to choose their own manner of collecting information. By using "information shortcuts," citizen can outsource the task of collecting information to trusted sources, and then receive them in condensed forms. It was my belief that the informants would political YouTubers in such a manner; they trust them to do the information gathering for them, and so feel satisfyingly informed on politics by watching political YouTubers.

2.9: Civic duty

"Civic Duty" can be understood as society's expectations of its citizens (Det Norske Akademi for Språk og Litteratur, 2021), of which one of the greatest duties is participation in democratic elections (Blais and Achen, 2019, p. 476). While some countries make civic duties mandatory, it is more common for a citizen's civic duty to be a privilege they are expected to make use of (Ibid, p. 476). Civic participation has been explained as "a critical behavior marker of community engagement and integration," playing a vital role in the construction and maintaining of a society (Samsuddin, Hasan, Ching, 2016, p. 33). It is not only limited to voting in an election, but also encompasses joining organizations for the betterment of one's community and other types of political activity. Since the introduction of the internet, we separate civic participation into two parts: traditional (offline) and digital (online) (ibid, p. 33). Traditional civic participation is, for example, attending meetings and rallies, voting, and other activities that require physical activity, while digital civic participation can include signing petitions, sharing information, or interacting with political content online.

Media plays a part in people's civic participation. Studies have discovered that heavy internet use encouraged people to join in voluntary organizations, and the flexibility of the internet as a communication channel encouraged further civic participation (Ibid. p. 33).

By normative standards, citizens in a democracy should be well-informed and willing to participate in democratic elections. The ideal has, however, changed a lot over the years: Schudson (2000) shows how the field of politics has changed from being exclusively for the elite, to now being far more concerned with individual people's rights. Schudson says that we need a new understanding of what civic participation is, one that makes room for the progressive acceptance for and inclusion of minority groups, participation in non-party political agencies, and elite-challenging political action (Schudson, 2000, p. 13-14). When it comes to political participation, it has also been defined in numerous terms – from actively

being a part of a political party, to voting, petitioning and so on. Also, here we must differentiate between offline and online participation (Samsuddin, Hasan, Ching, 2016, p. 33).

One of the main complaints people often level against those who get their political content from non-traditional sources is that it will not lead to offline civic participation, and, by extension, voting (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 11). However, Samsuddin, Hasan and Ching found that digital engagement had a positive effect on youth's political and civic participation (2016, p. 37). Van Zoonen (2005) and Kaun have both researched the subject. In 2012, Kaun researched young Estonians' understanding of civic participation. Kaun introduced the concept of "civic experiences" in order to incorporate non-action-based forms of civic participation (Kaun, 2012, p. 254).

Many theories on civic participation focus primarily on action as the starting point for understanding citizenship as performance (Kaun, 2012, p. 253). However, Kaun argues that civic participation goes beyond that. She writes that "political activity comes, for most people, through their choosing, attending to, processing and engaging myriad media texts about the formal political processes of government and political institutions as they conduct their daily lives" (Ibid, p. 256). In other words, political activity is not necessarily a conscious decision, but comes as a result of people living highly mediated lives in which we engage with political content on a daily basis. These non-action-based forms of civic experiences can then lead to action-based civic experiences. By some definitions, interacting with political content on YouTube would not be counted as civic participation. However, by Kaun's extended definition of citizenship, watching YouTube videos about politics is a form of civic participation. Kaun also notes how much research has been too focused on hard news as the major mediator between the political elite and the ordinary citizen, but that popular media might play a similar role for some (Ibid, p. 256). Our civic experiences, no matter what format we receive them through, are already mediatized, writes Kaun (p. 257-258). That means, they are already molded into experiences by media, which explicitly includes popular cultural formats.

Politics and media have had a contentious relationship for a long time. Popular media has been accused of turning politics into a "soap" opera by sensationalizing cases, for using celebrities to promote political ideas (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 20), and for turning politicians into celebrities, and vice versa (Ibid, p. 84). The term was made popular by Tony Blair in 1999(Ibid, p. 19), who accused the media of focusing too much on scandals, incompetence, and conflict (Ibid, p. 25). However, the soap-analogy might not be wholly negative, as it can

help present the complex world of politics in more entertaining and easier to understand terms (Ibid. p 33). With TV being the most popular media of the time, it was how people experienced and understood the world (Ibid, p. 27). In the same manner, those who have YouTube as their main source for political content will have their understanding of politics and what it means to be politically active shaped by their chosen media.

A point of debate for media's effect on citizenship is whether or not it creates unhealthy relationship between viewer and political commentator. "There is a great fear among scholars" Van Zoonen writes (Ibid, p. 125), "that voters will vote based on how much they like a person, rather than what their policies are, and that voters will be ignorant regarding who they should vote for." Research has shown that voters do prefer candidates and political figures they perceive to be "like themselves," be it in terms of religion, ethnicity, gender, geographical background, or sexuality (Ibid, p. 126).

On YouTube, the political commentators and channels put in work to keep up their own popularity with their fans, but they are not unique in doing so. "Celebrity politicians" have existed for many decades, with the most prominent (and successful) being Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and of course Donald Trump. According to John Street (2019, p. 5), there are two types of celebrity politicians: politicians acting like a celebrity, or a celebrity who goes into politics. Street refers to Trump as a "superstar celebrity politician," someone who was a superstar first, then went into politics second. He says that we have to understand politicians as performers (ibid, p. 4), and that we must understand celebrity politicians as celebrities first, politicians second (ibid, p. 4). By the same logic we must understand political YouTubers as YouTubers first, political commentators second.

Yet, Van Zoonen says "there is no support for the theory that citizens become less informed and apathetic because of television and infotainment" (2005, p. 11). In fact, "the more politically active people are, the more they know who they want to vote for, and the more leadership qualities matter to them" (Ibid, p. 125) Even though politics on YouTube is a merger between politics and entertainment (see next chapter), engaging with political content on YouTube must be seen as a form of political, civic engagement, which then, according to Van Zoonen, should lead to increased knowledge about whom to vote for.

The fear, then, seems to stem from the idea that the information those who engage with political content on YouTube gets is wrong. In the lead-up to the 2016 election, the term "fake news" was made popular by Donald Trump, who used it loosely to describe news reports about him which he considered to be fraudulent in nature (Corner, 2017, p. 1101). YouTube

and other major social media sites were accused of being perfect breeding grounds for fake news (Ibid, p. 1102), however, as we saw in the previous chapter, YouTube have taken actions to prevent politically dubious content from getting a foothold on their website.

Based on the texts and theories I have presented in this chapter, I saw it is highly likely that young adults could use YouTube to either become more informed about politics, or at least feel like they were becoming more informed.

2.10: Politics as entertainment

Politics on YouTube is, in many ways, quite different from offline politics. This shows itself if many ways, but particularly in the type of content that is often discussed by the channels (Saastad, 2020, p. 82). Several of the largest political channels mentioned during the interviews by my informants rarely, or ever, talk about politics of economy. Instead, they discuss politics through a scope that might be more relatable for young people, and are primarily preoccupied with Culture War issues.

"Culture War" was an expression made popular in 1991 by sociology professor James Davidson Hunter. In his book titled "Culture Wars", Hunter wrote that "America is in the midst of a culture war that has and will continue to have reverberations not only within the public but also within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere" (Hunter, 1991, p. 34)

A culture war, or perhaps we should say *The* Culture War, is not an armed conflict, but a continuous series of disagreements on what a country is, and what direction the country should be moving in, fought between two groups: progressives and conservatives. The issues being debated are issues concerning moral authority: should we allow gay marriages in our country? Is access to abortion a human right? Will multiculturalism enrich or destroy our society? By moral authority, Hunter (1991, p. 42) means the basis we judge whether or not something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable.

In today's society, the Culture War is not confined to the borders of single countries; its frontlines have moved to the internet, where moral questions are debated on social media, including YouTube. On YouTube, questions about sex, gender, and sexuality are hot topics, drawing input from content creators from several countries. Hunter describes these as "not just utterances of the political fringes, but the articulation of concerns that are central to the course and direction of the mainstream popular public culture" (Hunter, 1991, p. 33).

Culture war issues are often deeply personal, can seem irreconcilable, and are based on people's basic understanding of how society should be, therefore often creating passionate debate (Ibid, p. 44). It was my belief that due to the nature of the topics being discussed,

young adults would find the politics on YouTube to be a lot more engaging than those being discussed by local or national "offline" politicians. I expected to find that the young adults followed politics on YouTube because here they had found a branch of politics that both interested them, as well as entertained them; you will not hear Norway's top politicians debate the relationship between Donald Trump and classic movie villains, but you will on YouTube, if you know where to look (Some More News, 2020).

YouTubers, if we paraphrase Hunter slightly, are also in a uniquely strong position to sway people's minds in the Culture War. Hunter speaks of "knowledge workers," people who can reach large crowds and who has a position of power in society. With up to several millions followers, political YouTubers can reach enormous crowds of people with their content. One of the reasons why their content has the ability to get through to such large amounts of people is because they are able to balance content that is both enjoyable and entertaining. This was something I was already aware of, but it was made even more clear when one of my informants referred to the content as "edutainment."

Edutainment, writes Nalan Aksakal, is derived from the words entertainment and education, and means to learn or teach by entertaining (Aksakal, 2015, p. 1232), and has proven to have a very positive effect on people's ability to memorize what they are taught (Ibid, p. 1238). Aksakal's paper "Theoretical View to the Approach of The Edutainment" provides a solid basis for understanding edutainment as a concept, how it affects learning and, in my chosen field of study, how it can help explain why some methods of learning are preferred over others. Edutainment is reliant on visual media, such as video games or videos (p. 1232). Aksakal found several different interpretations of exactly what edutainment means, one of which reads: "Edutainment is described as a type of entertaining which is designed with the aim of educate by including entertaining variety such as multimedia software, internet sites, music, films, video and computer games and TV programs in order to exhilarate in addition to educate" (p. 1233). This is the definition I use when referring to edutainment.

From the start of my work on this thesis I assumed that the entertainment value of political videos on YouTube would be an important factor in why young adults chose to engage with the content. When given the choice between two sources of information, it seems logical that a person will choose the one that presents the information in the most entertaining manner. A reason why politics on YouTube might be more entertaining than offline politics is because of the America-centric view of the politics discussed. Even if the informants did not find it relevant, I assumed they would still find it enjoyable.

2.11: Identity and relationships

From a very young age, media helps us define who we are. It helps us define the world around us, our reality, and our understanding of our place in it. As recipients of media, we have to define our place in a world we largely experience through media; a media that will show us places we've never been, and perhaps never will travel to either, or experiences that otherwise would be beyond our reach (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 17). These experiences and impressions are then used to create our own understanding of who we are, who we want to be, as well as who we are not, and who we certainly don't want to become. This understanding of who we are is what we call our identity (Ibid, p. 17) Gripsrud describes a person's identity like a patchwork quilt (Ibid, p. 18), one we never stop working on. As part of our identity is made up of our political conviction and affiliations, I wanted to look at how this might affect the way the informants interact with political content on YouTube. Does it mean they only watch channels that align with their own understanding of where they stand politically? How has politics on YouTube been a part of defining their identity up until now?

YouTube is also a superb place for content and content creators one can *identity* with. To identify with someone, says Gripsrud (Ibid, p. 25-26), means to consciously desire to be more like them, either regarding their attitudes and beliefs, or something they have done. We can also identify with people in a community, which often results in what is called "imagined communities," communities not tied to a geographical location (Ibid, p. 18) Since we never stop defining and redefining our identity, we are constantly looking for new and attractive authority figures, or role models, to whom we form emotional ties (Ibid, p. 26).

It was my belief that my informants would strongly identify with their favorite YouTubers. This is due to Horton and Wohl's parasocial relationship theory from 1956. Horton and Wohl describe how new media, using TV as the example, create an illusion of a relationship between the watcher and the performer, and call it a "parasocial relationship" (Horton and Wohl, 1997, p. 27). They describe how the performer dons a "personae," a personality that is a product, or function, of media. This personae only exists in the parasocial relationship with the viewer. The viewer feels he knows this personae, and puts a great deal of confidence in them (Ibid, p. 28). Going into this project, it was my theory that parasocial relationships would play a major part in explaining what YouTubers my informants preferred.

The link between YouTube and parasocial relationships have already been explored numerous times before. One of the inspirations for my thesis was Monstad's Master's thesis, in which she studied the parasocial relationship between the YouTuber "Zoella" and her fans, though Monstad primarily used the comment section on Zoella's videos as her source

material. Monstad's work leaned heavily on Theresa M. Senft's writing on the internet-created phenomenon "microcelebrity;" someone who is a self-made celebrity, using a new platform to cultivate a following like movie or sports stars, the microcelebrity, usually, does not get any coverage in traditional media, and is reliant on other forms of exposure. Microcelebrities therefore have to "brand" themselves, turning themselves into their own corporations (Senft, 2013, p. 351). There is a lot more interaction between the microcelebrity and their followers (Ibid, p. 350), and familiarity through sharing a lot more personal information (Ibid, p. 352).

Ferchaud Et al. did extensive research on how parasocial relationships are created and maintained on YouTube, seemingly intentionally by the YouTubers themselves. By analyzing previous work on parasocial relationships, they showed how YouTubers are often considered more authentic, approachable, and influential than mainstream celebrities (Ferchaud Et al., 2017, p. 88). Building on Horton and Wohl, they found two key elements were needed to create a parasocial relationship: identification with the media personae and a need for companionship. They also discovered that several elements could help create and cultivate relationships between YouTuber and subscriber, such as the attractiveness of the YouTuber, the direct address and intimacy afforded by the medium, sharing of personal details, visual cues like staring directly at the viewer when they talk, fourth wall breaks, the shooting location (such as a bedroom or someone's personal apartment), the gender of the watcher and the personae, and the type of celebrity in question (Ibid, p. 89-90). As with Senft, they agreed that YouTube was changing what was considered a celebrity (Ibid, p. 89).

Due to the high levels of trust followers often have towards their favorite YouTubers, I also considered it likely that the YouTubers might function as intermediaries between media and recipients. Paul F. Lazarsfeld called this "the two-step flow," in which news travel from media outlets to a person with unusually high interest in media, an "opinion leader," who then passes it along to members of his society (Lazarsfeld Et Al., 1968, p. 151). I also considered it a possibility that my informant would function as opinion leaders themselves, passing along information from the YouTubers to people in their own community.

Part 3: methodological approach

3.1: Ethical dilemmas

I had to translate the citations from my informants from Norwegian into English. Instead of doing a word-for-word translation, I focused on preserving the message, as well as culturally significant expressions. I chose to write the quotes as if spoken by a more native English speaker. I took extreme care not to alter any of the original meaning of any quotes.

One part of the citations I found it necessary to change were the pronouns my informants used when talking about Philosophy Tube, or Abigail Thorn. Thorn came out as a trans woman between the interviews and the completion of this paper. I therefore reached out to all the informants who had mentioned her in their interview, asking for permission to change the pronouns if I was to use a quote from them about Thorn. All informants gave me permission to change the pronouns used from he/him to she/her.

Regarding political YouTubers, I have tried to not let any personal biases towards certain channels direct this thesis paper. As I am intimately familiar with political YouTube, I also know the history of some of the channels. I have done my best to present every channel mentioned by my informants in a fair and unbiased way.

I have taken great care to ensure that all my informants will remain anonymous. They were all given randomly selected pseudonyms, and only I know their true names. Due to the nature of the content being discussed, it could be very harmful if any of my informants could be recognized from the interviews. I have therefore omitted, to the best of my abilities, anything that can be used to identify them.

Gentikow (2005, p. 49) says there exist an uneven power dynamic between researcher and informants. As the researcher, I had to take great care not to affect my informant's answers in any way. My job was only to direct the conversation towards the desired topic. I had to be careful not to steer my informants towards giving the answers they thought I wanted to hear, rather than their own truth.

3.2: Method selection

"Method" means a structured plan for we are going to acquire knowledge. It is a formalized set of rules and techniques to help us in our research, as well as an insurance to guarantee satisfactory scientific work (Gentikow, 2005, p. 32). When selecting method, the most important thing to consider is: what is it you want to investigate (Østbye Et Al, 2007, p. 98)? Past research has focused on political YouTube being a "radicalization pipline" (Ribeiro Et al. 2020), how political YouTubers operate in a network (Lewis, 2019) and what rhetoric

techniques they use (Saastad, 2020). But what I want to study are what Gentikow (2005, p. 13) calls media experiences; I want to attain a deeper understanding of how young adults use YouTube as a political platform than what can be achieved by studying quantitative data. My primary source of information must come from the people who actually fit the category "young adult who uses YouTube as a platform for political content." I have therefore used a qualitative method in my experiment.

3.3: Qualitative method

Unlike quantitative method, qualitative method in media research is less occupied with hard facts and numbers and focuses instead on users' experiences with media. This has led to some criticism from those who favor the quantitative method (Gentikow, 2005, p. 35): due to the explorative nature of qualitative research, some say it can only be used as a pre-requisite to further, more scientific research, which takes place in the quantitative part (Ibid, p. 38).

However, to discredit qualitative method is to misunderstand its purpose within science. The qualitative method has given us numerous famous scientific studies within media research, like Janice Radway's 1984 study "Reading the Romance," in which she studied why female readers enjoyed romance novels (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003, p. 219), and David Morley's "The Nationwide Audience," where he tested out Stuart Hall's model for encoding/decoding in praxis (Ibid, p. 91).

While quantitative method is dominated by rigorous rules, the qualitative method compensates by being more self-reflexive. The researcher must critically consider every choice made along the way for the end result to be satisfactory. Only that way can their data achieve the validity and reliability critics claim it lacks (Gentikow, 2005, p. 37).

The main difference between the qualitative and quantitative approach is the material you are left with after you are done collecting it, or rather, the properties of the data you have collected (Østbye Et Al., 2007, p. 96). In theory, the two methods can be combined, however this is extremely time-consuming work, and not feasible for a single master's student to do on their own (Gentikow, 2005, p. 35).

When conducting qualitative research, the researchers use a smaller selection of informants. Through various methods he seeks to attain a deeper understanding about a narrow field. The researcher is not attempting to find a universally "true" answer to a hypothesis; when it comes to human experiences there rarely ever is a clear yes-or-no answer to be given (Ibid, p. 37). It is therefore important that the research is limited in scope, as a depth of knowledge about a field is the goal in a qualitative research.

I have limited my research of how young adults use YouTube by only focusing on their use of a very limited type of both content and YouTubers. Through interviews, I sought to better understand the media choices my informants made. I wanted to know how and why they chose to interact with political content on YouTube, and what uses they could find for the content they interacted with. To achieve this, my research is heavily inspired by reception analysis research theories.

3.4: Reception research

Reception research is an inductive approach (Gentikow, 2005, p. 34) which grew out of the uses and gratifications research discipline (Schröder Et al., 2003, p. 123). Uses and Gratifications differed from many other disciplines by moving the focus from what media did to people, to what people did to media instead (Ibid, p. 123). It focused on answering the questions "why do people use media, what do they use them for, and how do people make sense of the media?" (Ibid, p. 239). The reception research discipline's main difference from its predecessor is a switch from quantitative to qualitative methodology.

Schröder Et al. says that if researchers want to understand how people experience media content, they must choose the appropriate research approach. Reception research is built on the belief that neither analysis of media texts nor questionnaire-based analysis can grasp the complexity of media experiences. For that we need the qualitative interview, in which informants are allowed to voice their own experiences with media material (Ibid, p. 122).
The four defining characteristics of the reception research discipline are:
1: reception research explores the encounter of active audiences with media meanings. This continues the uses and gratification line of thinking, in which audiences *do* things with media, but it goes beyond just exposing themselves in search of gratification or to fulfill a need. Active audiences also use the media to create their own social, political and cultural identities, as well as construct society around them.
2: Reception research regards meaning as a joint product of text and reader. This implies that the social meaning of a text cannot be understood by an expert. The media text has encoded potential, but it is up to the reader to create their own meaning from it.
3: The situational and social contexts of reading affect the meanings actualized by audiences. The media texts are interacted with by individuals who exist within social contexts, which has an effect on how they interpret the media texts.
4: the preferred methodological approach of reception theory is the qualitative interview. Verbalized user experiences that are as authentic as possible is what the researcher is after.

3.5: Criticism of the qualitative approach: validity, reliability, and generalizability

The most common criticism against the qualitative approach is that it lacks validity because its data is built upon subjective interpretations, reliability because the interviewer asks leading questions, and generalizability because the data it uses comes from too small a selection of people (Gentikow, 2005, p. 56). However, Gentikow presents ways researchers can get around these issues, by modifying them to work better in accordance with the qualitative method.

3.5.1: Validity

When we are talking about validity in terms of qualitative research, we mean whether or not the data, both from the interviews and the theories we are using to analyze it, we are using is relevant for our overarching thesis question. It should also focus on our operationalizing of the study, to see if what we are asking our informants really is relevant compared in terms of what we are trying to find out (Gentikow, 2005, p. 59).

In this study I have run a pilot study and made minor alterations to my interview guide during the entire process to make certain the interviews produced the right sort of information that was relevant for my thesis question. I have relied on a large library of literature, some of which I read prior to the interviews, some which I researched after the fact. This literature has been used frequently throughout my analysis chapter, which has helped me answer my research question in what I feel is a satisfactory manner.

3.5.2: Reliability

In quantitative media research, reliability means: can the research that has been done be trusted? Would researchers come to the same conclusion if they did same experiment (Schwebs, Ytre-Arne, Østbye, 2020, p. 177)? Naturally, in qualitative research, the answer would be no. Even if asked the exact same questions, informants are not going to provide the exact same answer at a different point in time (Gentikow, 2005, p. 58), and different researchers would not have my experience with political YouTube as a basis for their research. As I am intimately familiar with political YouTube, I have had to make sure only to let it affect my research in a way that is productive, and not let biases affect my analysis

Therefore, we need to reconsider reliability when it comes to qualitative research. Qualitative research must make itself reliable by presenting its findings in a credible and reasonable manner, and by constantly considering if the work that is being done is done in the best possible manner (Ibid, p. 59).

Throughout the process of writing this thesis I have several times made alterations to it to ensure that the final conclusions I draw from my material line up with the thesis question. It

has also made me disregard many sources as outdated: YouTube is a medium that changes rapidly, in terms of user interface, what content it allows, and what content is popular. Therefore, it has been important to me whenever I am using an article about YouTube that it is relatively modern.

By doing this, I feel I have been able to ensure that my theories and findings are as reliably presented as they can be. I have not discarded any contradicting findings from my interviews, but rather highlighted them as an important part of multifaceted way young adults interact with political content on YouTube.

3.5.3: Generalizability

The most contentious point for the qualitative method is generalizability. Generalizing means to turn our findings into general rules or guidelines for a phenomenon (Schwebs, Ytre-Arne, Østbye, 2020, p. 177). The quantitative method manages this by having a large group of informants. Again, the qualitative method must approach the issue differently.

By not focusing on generalizing as far as individual people are concerned, but instead on the phenomenon we are exploring, we might be able to generalize about the phenomenon itself (Gentikow, 2005, p. 62). If we do, there will eventually be no need to include more informants in your study, as it will only lead to saturation, meaning you get no new information from your informants (Ibid, p. 62)

My thesis is not meant to generalize widely, but it is my belief that it can be used to get a better understanding about how and why young adults use YouTube for political content. I do not believe that a quantitative study would allow for these experiences to be properly presented by my informants, and thus I believe a qualitative approach was the right choice.

3.6: Qualitative semi-structured interviews

The qualitative interview is a longstanding tradition in media science. In Norway it can be dated back all the way to the 1850's (Østbye Et Al., 2007, p. 98). The qualitative method mostly relies on interviews with informants. They are called informants because of their purpose in the experiment: to inform, to provide information. It is what they say that ultimately become the basis for the entire project, and which will be used to answer the research question. As a researcher I am informed about their insights and reflections regarding the subject at hand (ibid, p. 99).

The qualitative interviews can, among other things, give us access to information it might otherwise be difficult to attain, map processes and social relations, help us confirm or refute data from other sources, and allow us to test out our own hypothesis (ibid, p. 99).

I wanted to use qualitative interviews because I wanted to hear from those who actually use YouTube for political content, and to tell their side of the story. A lot of the published material on political YouTube is of quantitative form, often focusing on, like with Ribeiro Et al. (2020), the dangers of YouTube as a radicalizer. I hoped that by giving a voice to those who have hands-on experience with political YouTube, it would be possible to explore the nuances of their relationship to it and what it means to them and show that it has other functions than those it has become most associated with.

The most common type of interviews used in an empirical, qualitative study is the semi-structured interview. Not as rigid as the structured interview, but not as open as the unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview allows for a great deal of freedom for the informant to showcase their knowledge on a particular subject (Gentikow, 2005, p. 83).

I had originally intended to carry out group interviews – gathering people who watched the same political YouTubers and having an open conversation. However, due to the global pandemic situation, I scrapped the idea and went with one-on-one interviews instead. These were carried out using the video-call program Zoom, which allowed me to easily record the interviews. The downside was that some of the personal connection with my informants was lost. Gentikow says that being in the same room as your informants can produce data with high levels of validity (Ibid, p. 84).

3.7: Interview structure

The interviews were divided into two parts; the first part was designed to map the informants' use of YouTube, their understanding YouTube as a platform for political content, and their understanding of how YouTube works as a political platform. In this part, the informants were asked questions like: "How long have you been following politics on YouTube?" and "Do you share political videos with other people?"

The second part of the interview was unique for each informant, though there was some overlap. In this part, the questions were more about the informant's relationship with the YouTubers they followed, or specifically about the content they saw and liked, or about how they felt about watching politics on YouTube as a whole. Some examples are: "What is it about [political YouTuber's] videos that you like?" and "A lot of the channels you watch talk mostly about American politics. Do you still think it's relevant and important for you?"

An initial test-interview was carried out with a student I knew from my job as an education assistant to determine whether my interview guide needed changing. Unsurprisingly, the test interview revealed a few flaws: firstly, I had been too coy when it came to asking for the

information I sought. This was a remnant from the initial plan for the interviews, when they were meant to be group interviews. I had relied a little too much on open ended questions to create a conversation between the informants, but with the change in dynamic came the necessity for the questions to change, too. I rewrote several of the questions to ask more directly for the information I sought. Second, a few of the questions provided shorter answers than I had hoped for and were rewritten to be more open ended. Finally, one question was easily misunderstood, and had to be rephrased.

3.8: Data and analysis

The drawback of the semi-structured interview is that the collected data still requires a lot of processing before it can be used, and the researcher will have to reign the informant in to make sure he gets the crucial information he set out to get (Østbye et al., 2007, p. 100).

After the interviews I was left with more than ten hours of recordings, which were then transcribed. I then set to work analyzing the material. Gentikow says that one of the most important parts of analyzing transcribed material is to find a structure (2005, p. 116). I went over every interview several time before I began looking for common themes. Since all the files were transcribed and saved digitally, it was easy to use Microsoft Word's tools to take notes and code the material. Coding means to categorize and classify (Ibid, p. 119). During the coding process, the researcher must be careful not to let their preconceptions and desired outcomes get in the way of what is actually in the material (Ibid, p. 119). I wrote a short summary for each of the interview and included some of the most telling quotes from them. I then wrote down keywords from each interview, to see what appeared most frequently.

The analyzed material was then used to create classifications that would guide my analysis chapter. My classifications were based on the most commonly recurring themes from the interviews. Some of the classifications I had expected to find, like the entertainment value of politics on YouTube being mentioned by several informants, while other discoveries were more surprising.

3.9: Recruitment process

The process of recruiting candidates for the experiment was somewhat hindered by my lack of access to possible candidates, largely due to Covid-19.

I initially thought that my easy access to students, being both a student myself and a teaching assistant, would enable me to quickly find potential candidates. However, due to the lockdown and nearly all seminars and lectures being held digitally rather than physically, finding candidates for my interviews became a bigger challenge than I had anticipated.

This forced me to look for alternatives. I ended up recruiting participants from a wide variety of places, the only common denominator being that everyone was recruited online. I reached out to other teaching assistants, who in turn asked their students via email if anyone was interested in partaking in the project. Two participants were recruited this way. Another four came from contacting political youth parties and having them share the invitation among their members. One was recruited through the anonymous text and image sharing application "jodel", which has is its own subforum for political discussion. Some saw a Facebook post I made asking for participants, while others were recruited through word of mouth and the snowball method.

I had initially hoped for an even distribution of participants from both sides of the political spectrum on YouTube, however, this turned out to be so difficult I eventually abandoned it completely. While finding participants who watched left-wing YouTubers was moderately easy, those who watched right-wing YouTubers were far more reluctant to talk to me. Noticing the disparity, I tried to intentionally seek out candidates in right-wing forums, but wherever I went, from different Reddit subforums to 4chan's infamous /pol/-board, I was quickly accused of being either an undercover cop looking for people to put on a watch list, or of being an undercover CIA operative.

Some of this reluctance was also displayed during the interviews: the few candidates I was able to interview who held more right-wing views were less talkative and open to share them than those who leaned left.

In the end I ended up with thirteen informants, of whom most watched only left-wing channels, one preferred centrist channels, and two watched both left- and right-wing channels.

3.10: Informants

It was important to me that all my informants were young people, aged 18 to 25. I wanted young adults who were of voting age, and who belong to the age demographic who use YouTube most actively.

The group consisted of nine men and four women. They were all either currently studying or had been students until recently. Their chosen fields of study varied widely, from medicine, law, Russian language, world history, comparative politics, and more. Though they were all Norwegian citizens, one informant had a Swedish citizenship, while another had Canadian citizenship. For a brief introduction to each informant, see attachment 1.

I never had it as a goal to seek out a diverse group of informants. I did not think I would find an overwhelming number of informants to choose from and feared that if I chose based on

certain criteria it could dilute the data. This did result in a rather homogenous group of people: they were all white, aged within five years of each other, with the oldest being 25 and the youngest 20, and apart from one informant identifying as bisexual, were all heterosexuals.

Part 4: Analysis and results from interviews

Introduction to analysis

The interviews yielded a plethora of interesting insights into the YouTube-habits and interests of my informants; some of the information I had sought from the outset, while some was surprising discoveries made along the way. In this chapter I have analyzed my findings from the interviews, and I begin answering my main research question. My analysis is divided into different thematic sections based on my discoveries during my analysis.

4.1: Use of YouTube

I started each interview by asking my informants what YouTube means to them. I wanted a general understanding of how they thought of YouTube as a medium and platform. I wanted to have a baseline understanding of how YouTube was a part of their media repertoire.

One phenomenon that was repeated across the interviews was how the informants spoke of YouTube as one of the most important media source they interacted with on a daily basis. Carl, who described himself as an "active internet user" said:

"YouTube is the medium that I spend the most time on. I think it's fantastic, because it gives you such a complete, or a lot of people say it doesn't anymore, but at least give the individual creators of videos a lot of freedom. (...) So YouTube I think, it's the social media I spend the most time on, yeah. I spend a lot of time on YouTube. Every now and then I'll let YouTube podcasts or conspiracy theory videos play in the background while I play on the computer or watch a movie or something."-Carl, 22

For Carl, YouTube could serve the double function of being both a source for entertainment, but also to provide him with background noise while he was doing other thing, the same way many people often use the TV. George also named it has his most important source for media consumption. The way he talks about YouTube also makes it seem like it has taken over some of the functions of TV:

"YouTube is the majority of my media consumption. I visit YouTube several times a day. It's mostly what I do if I'm not busy doing something else, but when I just want to watch something or have some spare time I'll put on YouTube."
When you have some time to kill?
"Yeah, more or less, unless there's something specific I want to watch, like a series or something. But, yeah, it's mostly YouTube." -George, 25

Every informant was also asked the very open question "Can you tell me about YouTube? What is it to you?" A significant number of them went on to explain how they *used* YouTube

rather than what they watched. "*YouTube is my main media source. I use NRK as well, but it's first and foremost YouTube I use for entertainment. Well, except video games."* Said Richard. Anna had a similar description of her use of YouTube: *"To me YouTube is like, I use it mainly for entertainment, a sort of respite from everyday life, and I use it keep myself up to date on what is happening around the world."* Steve offered a longer explanation, but he too spoke of YouTube as something he *used*:

"I use YouTube both for relaxation and to learn new things that are outside of my curriculum, and outside of what I have been working with. When it comes to entertainment I watch a lot of, well, videos that attempt to explain things I don't know. And I try to educate myself when new things happen. Citizen salary, for example, there's a lot about that on YouTube. All sorts of concepts that sound weird really, it's easy to find videos on YouTube that will give you an explanation." -Steve, 23

Helen described herself as an "active user of YouTube all my life, or at least since it was made. It's tied into a lot of interests I have, and I recently became more politically interested on YouTube, and that tied in closely to YouTube as well."

The distinctive use of the word "use" seems to indicate that they do not consider YouTube as only a medium they are exposed to. Instead, it is a multi-functional tool that my informants could wield any way they wanted. It is quite possible that my informants would speak similarly of other social media, emphasizing the use of it. But as Steve showed, YouTube had a great deal of variety in uses to offer to them, which seems to be one of the main reasons why they liked it so much.

My informants were asked what sort of content they watch on YouTube, apart from political. The answers given to this question were far more varied. Several of them reported using YouTube for music, gaming-related content, and to watch videos about other hobbies and interests they had. Interestingly, a large portion of the male informants reported watching cooking channels. The common denominator was that they all sought out content that was both informative and entertaining. For example, when asked what made him subscribe to a channel, one informant said:

"It has to be interesting. And by interesting, I mean that it can be entertaining, or that I can learn something from it. Again, I want it to be both informative and fun. So when you follow a cooking channel it's not just because they make good food, but also because they have a nice dynamic on the screen."-Theo, 22

This combination of YouTube as a source of entertainment and education was repeated in almost every single interview. It prompted me to do a more in-depth review of the "edutainment" principle. Edutainment is a derived word that states a mixture of entertainment and education (Aksakal, 2014, p. 1232). Though it has been defined in several different ways, the easiest way to understand edutainment is education through entertainment by applying a multimedia approach. Video games are typically what comes to mind first, and a lot of the research on edutainment is focus on video games (see for example Ma & Oikonomou, 2017). However, edutainment exist across multiple platforms. Aksakal (2014, p. 1236) mentions TV as an example, pointing to how channels like Discovery Channel and History Channel try to make informative shows entertaining.

Not everyone is excited at the prospect of a union between entertainment and education. In her book "Entertaining the Citizen," Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005, p.2-3) wrote how Neil Postman's 1985 book "Amusing Ourselves to death" had vilified entertainment for its corruption of politics. Postman apparently had nothing against entertainment per se but despised it for its invasion of politics. Van Zoonen says television has been "made a scapegoat" for deteriorating political debate in our society, and that people have said television should be for entertainment only. According to some, the outcome of TV-journalism – too concerned with popularity, celebrities, and sensationalism – is a citizenry that think they are well-informed, despite being misguided (Van Zonnen, 2005, p. 11)

This scapegoating of television is very similar to the criticism leveled against politics on YouTube. Particularly the view that YouTube leaves one "misguided and manipulated." This understanding of YouTube as a potential "radicalizer" was something a lot of my informants were also familiar with and had reflected upon. Several of them reported having at some point made a shift from following right-wing channels to predominantly left-wing channels and were now keenly aware of the possibility of falling into an echo chamber. Hank, for example, said he would occasionally watch videos from the political right to *"make sure I'm not completely sealed off inside an echo chamber."* One informant who previously had followed a lot of right-wing political YouTubers started off the interviews by saying she was not worried about ending up in an echo chamber:

"The downside with political YouTube is that I don't read a lot of objective news sources because of it. I have my YouTube, and that's it, sort of. I read some news, like NRK, but mostly I just watch political YouTubers."

-Are you worried you might end up in an echo chamber again, only this time on the other side?

"Not really, because… I'm a bit more critical now of the content they publish than I was before."-Anna, 20

However, as the interview went on and she had more time to consider her own engagement with political YouTubers, she became less certain:

-Do you think these YouTubers affect you and your opinions?
*"Yes and no, because I feel that they… Hard to explain, but I do feel like I can see myself in these YouTubers when it comes to opinions, but at the same time, these are American YouTubers, so they don't know anything about Norwegian politics. So it's sort of… Oh no, now I start to wonder, maybe I am falling into a left-wing rabbit hole…"*Anna, 20.

Anna was unique in that she was the only one to say that YouTube replaced more serious sources of news and political information. Most said reported YouTube being an additional source to news and political content, besides what they got from traditional media outlets.

Because of the extensive way politics on YouTube has been covered in the media, including by political YouTubers themselves, my informants were able to reflect over the possibility that YouTube could lead to more extreme opinions in people. Several reported that they took measures to ensure they would not fall into any sort of "rabbit hole."

This leads us into another question all my informants were asked regarding their use of YouTube as a platform for political content: the channels discussing politics usually focus on American or British politics. This means, as Anna pointed out, that no matter how much political content my informants watch on YouTube, they are very unlikely to come across videos where something that will affect them personally is being discussed. I therefore wanted to know whether they thought the politics discussed in these videos mattered to them. The answer I was given was a unified "yes." George said it was important, because of USA's dominant position on the world stage:

-These channels you watch, it's mostly about American politics. Do you still feel like it's relevant for you?
"Yes, because… American Politics is, unfortunately, world politics. Because there are many, especially in the west, who follow USA, and to me especially, and this is anecdotical, I know, but I've felt since the 2016 election that we've had a much more visible radical right-wing in Norway. I thought FRP was as far right as you could go, but no, it goes way farther than that. So I think it's relevant. As relevant as Norwegian politics? No. But I have other channels for that. Not YouTube channels, but other sources, like the news."-George, 25

George felt he could see the direct effect of a polarized America on Norwegian politics, which made US-politics matter to his local community. Mary, a history student, also felt way American society has affected Norway over the years made US-politics relevant to her:

"Yes, because some of it has been combined with, or at least when it comes to the Lindsay Ellis video where she talked about protest music, protest music of the Bush era, then it's sort of history, you know? You kind of get the larger picture, a bit more insight into what she's talking about, like, okay, she's talking about how things were, how the protest music was, really. And I feel that the US does have a big influence over Norway. They are a very large actor on the world stage. So I do feel that it's relevant, really." -Mary, 24

The one who showed the most aversion towards American politics mattering for him was Jack, but he too referred to the US as a big player on the global political market, and to its close political ties to Norway:

"A lot of what they talk about isn't. But at the same time, USA is one of our closest allies, so how that land is run is going to have an effect on us. For example, Trump left the Paris agreement. And, what's it called… he made fracking and stuff like that come back. So that's… That goes against the global community, against climate, so that has an effect on Norway. And that their society is so polarized, I'm worried that's going to rub off on Norway, too." -Jack, 23

This sense of "border erasure" and American influence can be caused by the continuing globalizing effect the internet has had on society. Jack's mentioning of the "global community" seems to indicate that he thinks of US-politics as not separate for them, but as the politics of a larger, world-spanning community.

Several of my informants also noted the lack of a Norwegian alternative as one of the reasons for why they watched channels discussing primarily American politics on YouTube. By "lack of Norwegian alternative" I don't mean they didn't have access to Norwegian politics, merely that there was no source that presents Norwegian politics in the same entertaining way. Matthew said that he considered it his civic duty to read up on the different political parties in Norway, and then:

"I became gradually more and more interested in Norwegian politics, and then it gradually shifted over to American politics, because that's more action packed." -Matthew, 21

It seems to me that the main reason why young adults choose to get their political information from YouTube is because of the entertaining way it is presented, often combined with other hobbies they have, because it feels informative and relevant to them, and because they do not see a viable other option.

Aksakal writes that taking the learners needs into account is important if the goal is to improve learning (2015, p. 1237). Politics on YouTube seem to do this in a way that traditional media fails to do. What's more, according to Van Zoonen (2005, p. 11) there is no support for the accusation that new media and what she refers to as infotainment has made citizens less informed and more apathetic. Citizen today live in a highly mediated society, and politics has to compete for people's time and attention (Ibid, p. 2-3.)

4.2: Preferences in political YouTubers and political content

There are two main categories of political YouTubers: "Casuals" and "Austere." The three most popular political YouTubers among my informants were all from the Casuals category. Those were, in order of most to least popular, ContraPoints, Lindsay Ellis, and Philosophy Tube. Although most of my informants watched at least one Austere channel, and despite there being a fairly even split between informants who preferred Austere channels and those preferring Casual channels, none of the Austere channels could compare to the popularity of the most popular Casual channels.

Carl, who watched a mix of both Casual and Austere channels, explained his preference in channels thus:

"I don't follow CNN, or that sort of channels."
You prefer channels by… regular people?
"I'm not sure how to put it, but there's a sort of informality that comes with – or an informal branding that comes with YouTube, so when already established companies try to move onto the platform, it's always with middling success, because usually they just try to repeat their platform on YouTube, and that's not what makes YouTube fun."-Carl, 22.

Carl came to YouTube for a type of content he could not get elsewhere, with the "informal branding" being a vital part. Richard, who followed an even number of Casual channels and Austere channels, had this to say when asked what made him subscribe to a channel:

"It's got to be not just something I want to watch, but I also want to know when they have uploaded something new I want to see, and that the quality is consistent throughout their videos."
-What do you consider to be quality content?
"Something that's both entertaining and something I want to keep watching." -Richard, 24

Richard's desire for a consistent and predictable upload schedule was unique when it came to my informants, but the desire for "quality content" was present throughout several interviews, regardless of what kind of channel the informant preferred. Matthew, who

preferred Austere channels, combined the sentiments of both Richard and Carl when he tried to explain what made him follow a channel:

"I'm very critical to what I choose to follow. It has to be a channel I think is exciting, but also that I feel I am going to follow for a long time. Like, one video might be interesting, but mostly I want the whole channel to be interesting, that's when I'll start following, that's what I like. That's why I don't follow typical media channels who publish an hour long show every day, but instead channels who publish something they've worked on for a long time, and maybe publish once a week."
-Matthew, 21

Matthew, like Carl, came to YouTube for content he would not find elsewhere, at least not in traditional media outlets. For many of the informants, it was the unique sort of content found on YouTube that resonated with them. Many had not intentionally gone looking for political content, but had enjoyed it when they came across it and kept watching.

Steve was different. He followed several Austere channels, and the whole reason be had started following political channels on YouTube in the first place was to learn more about politics. For him it was important that the channels came across a serious and reliable:

"Political channels have a bigger responsibility, if you ask me, to use reliable sources. Like Legal Eagle, he says "I am a lawyer, and I justify what I say because of this and that information I have been given." And I can be wrong, I'm no political analyst, everyone can be wrong, but it's important that they're reliable in their use of sources, so you can know when they're wrong." -Steve, 23.

It seemed to me that Steve was also keenly aware of YouTube's reputation as a radicalizer, and therefore considered it extremely important that the channels he watched were reliable.

What type of *political content* they were interested in would also vary. It would often coincide with other hobbies, interests, or opinions they had. Sometimes it came in the form of them seeking out channels that covered specific topics they were interested in, as was the case with George. He explained how a channel he followed because of a hobby had started producing political content instead, which he did not seem to mind:

"Yes, Spice8Rack, that's a channel that intersects with another hobby I have, which is Magic: the Gathering (collectible card game). *It was his early videos on the Magic: the Gathering lore and the cards, or the shorter comedic bits that he made that I found interesting. And then as he developed more in a video essayist direction I've just tagged along (…) So yeah, it's a nice crossing point of two interests that I have."*-George, 25

George enjoyed watching a lot of political content that either dealt with or was presented through a pop-culture lens. Often these issues will be about race, sex, or gender, and are typical Culture War issues.

Steve also followed a channel he himself considered to be political (I would hesitate to classify it as a political YouTube channel), even though its primary focus was on football. This combing of politics with other interests seemed to resonate well with young adults and makes it easier for them to take an interest in politics.

"Football is a large field, and Tifo focuses a lot on the economic and judicial parts of football, as well as the technical aspects. And it explains complex ideas with simple illustrations, and makes it so easy to understand it's almost banal, so that even I can understand it."-Steve, 23

Again, Steve shows how, by combining political discussions with other hobbies and interests young adults might have, it makes it easier for them to take an interest in the politics being discussed.

LGBTQ+-content was very popular, especially among those following Casual channels. This was not surprising; a lot of those channels are helmed by members of the LGBTQ+ community, and a lot of the content they create deal with topics such as gender, sexuality, and what it is like being a non-cis person in today's society. Anna said: *"I want to keep myself up to date on lgbt-causes and stuff like that."* Later in the interview she appeared to be quoting one of the trans YouTubers she followed, CopsHateMoe, when she said of right-wing YouTubers *"they're very stuck in 2016, 2017, by making "attack helicopter" jokes* (a joke popular in right-wing communities. It makes fun of the idea that there are more than two genders) *and talking about soy-boys and all that."* Just looking at the top three most mentioned YouTubers in the interviews seem to indicate that sexuality and gender are topics that truly interest young adults today. However, these are topics not as openly discussed in traditional politics. They are an extremely important part of a person's identity (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 18-19) which could be a reason why so many of the young adults in my project found them to be interesting.

Those who preferred Austere channels had slightly different topics of interest, though with a lot of overlap. Theo explained why he was not as interested in Casual channels, while also giving me insight into what sort of content he did like:

"I guess the point for me is not to worship someone. For example, the nice thing about Andrew Heaton's (Reason Foundation) *podcast is that in almost every episode he's interviewing someone. The*

whole concept of the podcast is interviews, more or less. And it's mostly with academics or ambassadors he has a dialogue. I don't like preaching, from top down." -Theo, 22.

Jack, who also primarily followed Austere channels, was more interested in the economical side of politics. When asked about culture politics, his mind did not go to feminist readings of pop culture, but rather towards integration.

"It's about integration and stuff like that, at least for me, and not… Right and left, what I think about then is the economic side. And, yeah, you could be pro integration, like most Norwegian parties are, and be on the left, and at the same time you don't have to be on the right [to be critical of integration]. For example, libertarians do not want any integration." -Jack, 23

It was typical for those who preferred Austere channels to be less interested in cultural politics. They seemed to be more drawn towards serious discussions, and the ethos of the speaker was often considered to be very important. But cultural politics is still some of the most discussed political content on the site.

Culture War issues are popular topics for political YouTubers. Both Casual and Austere channels partake in dissecting, lauding, or ridiculing cultural phenomenon; from CopsHateMoe talking about how Netflix might have had good intentions but went about in the wrong manner when making the movie "Cuties" (CopsHateMoe, 2020), or Ben Shapiro's now infamous rendition and critique of CardiB's song "WAP" (Secular Talk, 2020). Since this is such a vital part of how politics on YouTube is discussed, I wanted to explore the informants' views on the merger between politics and pop-culture, and see if they had any thoughts about the Culture War concept.

The majority of my informants said they were familiar with the concept of Culture War. One of them gave the following short summary of how he defined "culture war":

"Culture war is when to cultures come in conflict with each other. And specifically, when I hear "culture war" then it's often… what comes to mind is a struggle between the "Christian" west and the "Islamic" east (his quotation marks)*, or it's a conflict between the political left and the political right wings."* -Hank, 23

Since several political YouTubers often talk about the Culture War in their videos, it is not surprising that my informants had feelings and opinions on the subject. My informants also considered politics and culture to be tightly linked, with the two reflecting and influencing each other. They seemed to view popular culture as a mirror of society, a way for society to scrutinize and comment on itself. That way, cultural politics had a high relevance for society.

-Do you consider popular culture and politics to be closely linked?
"Yes, very. It's because of movies I became interested in politics to begin with. Because of the way people are presented in movies. Because it's a mirror of our society, but at the same time it's a mirror of norms and values we have in our society. -Helen, 22.

Today, a large part of the culture war is concerned with questions about equality and representation in media. Be it ethnicity, gender or sexuality, progressives have been speaking up for more diversity in the media we consume. These were certainly subjects I found a lot of my informants had a deep personal interest in. Helen, who had a bachelor's degree in film studies, was especially interested in politics on YouTube regarding film and TV:

"Take the 80's show Dynasty, which I grew up with, that was a radical show at the time, because it had a bisexual character. But we never saw him (Steven Carrington, portrayed by Al Corley) *kiss boys, but he could kiss a lot of girls. And that's no coincidence, it's due to our values in society that say, okay, we accept that you are what you are, just don't be it in front of, you know? And it is gradually getting better and better in film, it's no coincidence. It's no coincidence that we don't have any queer Disney princesses, even though it's 2021."* -Helen, 22

Helen's notion that our cultural values are expressed through our popular culture is shared by Hunter, who calls them "discussion about what is fundamentally right or wrong in our society (1991, p. 32). By applying a multimedia approach, political YouTubers are able to get their own opinions and feelings about their culture across to their followers. However, the media will often only reproduce ideas already in society about what is right and wrong and might just reinforce opinions we already have (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 26)

The frontlines of the Culture War have moved drastically over the years, most importantly across countries' borders and into the digital realm. An important part of the Culture War in post-Reagan USA was censuring. The progressives would feel like they were unfairly targeted by censorship (Hunter, 1991, p. 240), while in 2021 the roles are reversed, as conservatives decry the current state of "cancel culture" (Fox News, 2021). The progressives have gained enough political power to expand their goals, seeking not just equal rights, but equal representation in media. While this has happened, many are now starting to take a critical look back at media of the past. These video essays then seem to become a part of the viewers political repertoire, from which they attain new opinions and ideas:

"A lot of my opinions have come from YouTube. My political enthusiasm, too. There were especially a lot of criticism of different pop culture phenomena that brought me… I would say it has mattered a

great deal for where I stand today, politically, really. So I'd say that's a little bit interesting… And it has made me more politically active." -Helen, 22

I also explored the informants' feelings towards YouTubers on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Since political YouTube is extremely polarized, I wanted to see if this was reflected in those who watch political YouTube channels. To a few this was less relevant than others, as they followed YouTubers on both sides of the spectrum, like Jack, who said:

"I think that… it seems to me that there are, on both sides, there's a few crazy people, if that makes sense (…) I've come to realize that just because someone is far to the left or far to the right, that doesn't necessarily mean they're evil, but there are evil people on those parts of the political spectrum."-Jack, 23

However, it was far more common for my informants to display some degree of hostility towards the "other side," which typically would mean right-wing political YouTubers. Several of my informants explained that watching content from YouTubers on the right made them feel some form of agitated, though for several different reasons. For Eileen it was the because of what she perceived to be a worldview completely at odds with her own:

-Are you familiar with anyone on the political right on YouTube?
"I know of a few characters. But I get made every time I stumble upon their content. It provokes me."
-Why does it provoke you?
"There's so much guesswork on that side. And I'm very left-wing, and the reason for that is because my focus is on people. I've worked for Red Cross, I donate what I can, I sign every Amnesty appeal and the likes, because for me people are what matter. And if you look on the right that's not necessarily the case any longer. There's a lot of me me me, what's best for me. And I think that's wrong. So there's a lot of guesswork not supported by data, and if you can't support your arguments with facts, research and logic, then there's not much I can do with that." -Eileen, 21

Kevin, to whom quality of content was very important, was not impressed with the presentation of the political right-wing on YouTube. He compared the political to the left with the political right, saying *"they know how to create visual content far better than the right. The right is able to swap camera angle every third minute. Well done* [sarcasm]*."* He went on to explain that he watched content from the political right if he *"feel like torturing myself,"* before elaborating more on exactly what it is he does not like about them, which sounds a lot like what Eileen had to say:

"I feel like I know what I'll end up with. It's stuff like "trans people don't deserve rights, segregated bathrooms, and Biden stole the election." It boils down to that sort of stuff. And I'm sure you could

use arguments like that for left-wing YouTube as well, it's two camps who usually… but I feel if you're going to go for an Occam's Razor-approach, then there's a lot less to cut away. I'm generally a fan of human rights. That's what it comes down to for me, it's about humanity, and that's where I think the left is better than the right" -Kevin, 22.

For Hank and several others, the poor citing of sources played a major part in why they did not like channels on the political right. For my informants, YouTube was a source of both entertainment and education, and since most of them were students themselves, it was important that the YouTubers they watched were not just making unfounded statements, but were able to show their work, so to speak:

"Well, I think, it might just be the group I've been following, but it's often, what I like about hbomberguy, Philosophy Tube and ContraPoints, and which Vaush is a little worse at, on the left they often have sources in their longer research videos, and they explain why they mean what they say. On the right it feels more like just opinions and common-sense arguments." -Hank, 23

Particularly those who preferred Casual channels showed a great deal of reluctance towards watching content produced by those on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Several of them had the same feeling as Richard did, saying of the YouTubers they do watch that they *"mainly like them because I agree with them."* Richard had previously stopped following several channels because he disagreed with their perceived political stances. The worry is that this might lead to situations were people who follow political YouTubers will end up in echo chambers. Though none of my informants reported believing they were currently in an echo chamber, several reported having been in one before, or, as Steve said: *"I wasn't in one, but I was in the hallway right outside. I was taking off my shoes, ready to step inside."* This is not unique to YouTube, as people will often choose to follow only political figures they agree with on social media (Aalen, 2015 p. 224)

4.3: YouTube and online-politics compared to traditional offline-politics

My informants distinguished between two spheres of politics: YouTube, and what they referred to as "the real world." By "the real world" they mean all political action and discourse that happens outside of YouTube, be it between politicians in a senate, or political discourse in other media. It is the similar to the difference Samsuddin, Hasan and Ching (2016, p. 33) draws, when they separate modes of civic participation into offline and online. To my informants, offline and YouTube are two separate entities when it comes to politics, and therefore it is interesting to investigate what politics on YouTube means to them, as well as trying to understand why it is one of their chosen platforms for political content.

The most common answer to the question "how is YouTube-politics different from real world politics?" was that YouTube-politics is a merger between politics and entertainment.

"It's like, on YouTube it's a combination of politics and entertainment. So that's why it's interesting to me, because they're talking about politics, but you can sit and relax, because it's not the same as watching the news on TV or read the news online or anything like that. It's the entertaining part that makes it easier to be more receptible for the political message. And, at the same time, you have these cool characters who are saying these things, not just some random news anchor, you know?" -Anna, 20.

Anna points to how she thinks the biggest difference lies in the entertainment value of YouTube, which she does not seem to think is present in offline politics. George also describes politics on YouTube as "fun" when he talks about the political YouTubers he follows, pointing out how Philosophy Tube and ContraPoints' presentation is part of what makes it so entertaining to watch. Kevin also sees YouTube-politics as more fun than that of the offline world, but he is careful to specify that it has its own shortcomings to deal with:

"YouTube is definitely more entertaining. Internet politics is a lot more fun. But also more difficult to take seriously. In the end it's often just "look at what this guy had to say" and then go in with your day. I don't think a YouTube video could ever make me vote radically different than what I normally do. I am aware that Norwegian politics is… not necessarily less interesting than American politics that we are fed all the time, especially right now. But I think it's… it's more manageable. I don't normally have to debate a Nazi." -Kevin, 22.

When pressed on why he thought politics on YouTube was more fun than politics in the real world, Kevin pointed to two important factors: the more extreme views combined with less filtering, and those debating politics on YouTube being more interesting characters than those found in the real world:

"It's mainly the framing of it. The camps are more extreme which… YouTube is a platform where everyone can upload videos and say whatever they want until their channels get taken down. But you do get more interesting political aspects as a result. There's less filter. You can watch anarcho-capitalists debate anarcho-primitivists because they are so and so. In Norway you can watch the Labor Party debate Høyre (political party) *for the hundredth time. And they disagree slightly and then the debate is over. It never gets as heated. It's a lot more fun to watch the debate on YouTube.*

-Does it have anything to do with the personalities? Is that what makes YouTube more fun?

"Yeah, it's hard to not find stronger personalities than Erna Solberg and Jonas Gahr Støre (leaders of Høyre and Labor Party respectively, Norways biggest political parties). So yes, absolutely. They're

not as… not as curated for the TV-screen as Solberg and Støre. You get more… It's more colorful." -Kevin, 22

Searching for entertaining content might lead people towards more extreme values. Van Tilburg and Igou (2016) have studied the connection between entertainment, boredom, and extreme political stances. They found that a possible explanation for why people are pushed towards more extreme content is due to boredom, which causes them to seek out meaning and purpose.

The YouTubers themselves were frequently brought up as one of the main appeals of political YouTube. This was particularly true for those who followed Casual channels. The YouTubers were often mentioned as the most entertaining aspect of political content on YouTube. For example, Mary said that whether or not she liked a youtuber was an important factor in deciding if she should subscribe or not, and mentioned Lindsay Ellis as a channel she follows primarily for the YouTuber themselves:

"Lindsay Ellis. I started following her… I saw her first as Nostalgia Chick (character played by Lindsay Ellis on the YouTube channel "Channel Awesome")*, and liked her videos, and then, I don't know, I stopped watching them for a while. Then I found out that there had been some drama, and found my way back to Lindsay Ellis. At first it was because I wanted to show her support for what she had been through, so to speak, but also because I thought she made incredibly good videos and had a lot of good points."* -Mary, 24

Another important factor, particularly for those who followed primarily Austere channels, was the sense that there was more variation in terms of views and ideas discussed on YouTube compared to politics discussed in offline politics. Kevin mentioned anarcho-capitalists and anarcho-primitivists, two groups who rarely feature on the grand political stages, as something you could learn more about on YouTube. For Theo, a self-described libertarian, YouTube was the place where he felt he saw his own views best represented. He had previously in his life described himself as both left-wing and right-wing, but, with the help of YouTube, had come to the conclusion he was a libertarian centrist. He had done that by consuming a wide variety of political content on YouTube, saying:

"When it comes to political channels on YouTube I like having a wide range of opinions. They have to be entertaining, but I don't necessarily have to agree with them." -Kevin, 22

The same was true for Jack, who followed both The Young Turks and Secular talk on the left, and Tim Pool and JellybeanGen on the right. He also wanted to hear different opinions on matters, and then draw his own conclusions:

"What's most important to me is that they voice their own opinions, and then I can draw my own conclusions from that. I mean, I do disagree with a lot of what they're saying, all of them." -Jack, 23

Several times during the interview, Jack stood out as an outlier. He was the only one willing to talk to me who followed and agreed with a YouTuber I would consider having far-right views, but he still followed channels that are far to the left. He also, interestingly, had a very low degree of trust in the YouTubers he followed, compared to most of the other informants. Jack repeatedly pointed out how he was not sure whether or not he could trust the YouTubers he followed, saying of right-wing political commentator Tim Pool that:

"He stretches the truth very far at times, until there's barely any truth left. And, yes, I'm thinking primarily about the whole election fraud situation in the US. They still haven't presented any real evidence for it, but Tim Pool keeps claiming that they have (…) If they are very far to the left or to the right they might be trying to manipulate you. Or, not manipulate, but get you to agree with something you might not really agree with." -Jack, 23

Trust was an interesting factor. There was a division between those who followed primarily austere channels and those who followed Casual channels. Those who followed Austere channels were more likely to seek out information to see a case presented from both sides, while those who followed Casual channels showed a much higher level of trust in the channels they followed, and mostly refrained from seeking out information that disagreed with them. Mary, who had followed Lindsay Ellis to show her support, felt she could tell the difference between when her favorite YouTubers were putting on an act and when they were being honest with their audience:

"I think both of them (Lindsay Ellis and Philip DeFranco) *come across as honest. I mean, obviously when it comes to Lindsay, she has that video she did on Titanic, in which she dresses up in a costume, but you understood that it was for the sake of comedy, and when she did stop to talk about the movie, she used her own normal voice instead of a fake British accent. That was just for the sketch. And I feel what we see in her own videos are her own opinions and, yeah, just straight up honesty about, yeah, who she is. She played more of a character as the Nostalgia Chick, because she had to be a counterpart to the Nostalgia Critic, but she's more herself now. Now she's talking about what she wants to talk about."* -Mary, 24

This sentiment was shared by, among others, George and Anna, who also felt that, even though their favorite political YouTubers might at time don a different persona to express an opinion of their counterparts, they could clearly distinguish between when the YouTuber was acting and when they were being honest:

"Yes, well, I mean especially channels like ContraPoints and Philosophy Tube, they often play characters with certain stances on issues, but it's done in a very theatrical way, so you always know when they're playing a character through, you know, costume or pronunciation. But I never get the impression that what they say about themselves isn't true."
-You feel they're honest?
"Yes. At least compared to… As honest as you can be in front of a camera." -George, 25

"That's a good question. I get the impression that they're pretty real, but of course you almost have to add a little personality, because of, I mean… This is their fulltime job, and they have to be as entertaining as possible, somehow, without seeming fake." -Anna, 20

Political YouTubers were also bestowed a great deal more faith and trust than actual politicians. When asked, Richard said that he absolutely trusted the YouTubers, and despite being a member of a political party, his feelings towards politicians was more ambivalent:

"In Norway, I would say so. I would say less honest the farther out to the right you go. But I think a lot of people on the right, they believe what they're saying, regardless of it being true or not. I don't think they hide their own opinions all that much, they often say their own opinions, but they might be influenced by things they don't know about."-Richard, 24

Eileen's trust was largely centered around the idea that the political YouTubers she followed were good people, while appearing more skeptical towards politicians and other parts of the media:

"…because I trust these people quite a lot. They seem like genuinely good people who want to use their voice to do something good and teach people about things they might not have known about from before (…) I feel they are honest about what they do. Of course there's some dramatization, like for example when hbomberguy had his Donkey Kong stream and collected a ridiculous amount of money for Mermaids (a UK-based organization who supports transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse children and young people (mermaids.org.uk)) *and, I mean, you don't do that just because you think it makes you look good, do you?"* -Eileen, 21

A little later in the interview, the conversation turned to her view on offline, traditional politics, and she confirmed her bias towards political YouTubers:

"One of my main sources for news and politics is NRK (Norwegian national broadcaster) *and I also pay close attention to Amnesty, because they feel like reliable sources who won't be influenced by… if you look at for example Fox News in USA, that's basically propaganda, because it's paid for out of pockets by politicians (…)"*

-What makes politics on YouTube different, do you feel?

"These are people. It's just regular people who wants to put what's bothering them into words and talk about what they think is important. They're not just paid by a white man on top of an economic pyramid. I mean, it's more like regular people versus the giants on top. And I think that's important, that you get the everyday human perspective, finically." -Eileen, 21

Anna used nearly the exact same words to describe the difference between politicians and political YouTubers:

"At the end of the day, these are just regular people talking about political things. And when you're a top politician you can't be so… honest as you might want to be, because you have to think about securing votes from people." -Anna, 20

Looking at these quotes, my informants distinguish clearly between political YouTubers and actual politicians, showing much higher trust towards the latter category. While politicians are some of the least trusted people in our society (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 5), political YouTubers are offered a great deal of trust. The reason is likely tied to politicians not being considered "normal people," and "are seen as talking at, rather than talking to, and are preaching, not sharing" (Ibid, p. 3). The media might be to blame for this level of distrust, as they often present politicians as puppets, "mouthing the words of others." People cannot relate to this, because it is not how we think of ourselves (Ibid, p. 29-30). It becomes much easier for my informants to identify with the political YouTubers instead, because they mainly project good qualities onto them (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 25-26). It is then not surprising to hear Helen say that she agrees more with the YouTubers she watches than the political party she herself is an active member of:

"[I agree with] all the one's I've talked about so far. I feel that, I think what they say makes sense. And sometimes they talk about things that, even though the party I'm a member of disagree with it, I find myself agreeing with it." -Helen, 22.

There was one more aspect of how politics on YouTube is different from traditional politics I wanted to talk about with my informants: namely the very hostile us-vs-them mentality. In Norway, political discourse is usually courteous and polite. There have been a few incidents of verbal hostility that sparked some degree of outrage, but for the most part, the discussion

rarely gets very animated.

On YouTube, however, the us-vs-them mentality is integral to the structure of how political discourse is performed. There is a popular belief on YouTube that drama and negative content gets more views, which incentivizes political YouTubers to create videos about issues they have with society, or other YouTubers. What I wanted to know was if my informants enjoyed this type of content, in which political YouTubers go after each other. I felt that might indicate that they prefer a less civil manner of political discourse.

The answers given to the question of whether they liked "hit-pieces" was tied to what sort of YouTubers they followed. Particularly those who followed hbomberguy, who has made a career out of making very long videos in which he corrects and ridicules the political right enjoyed this type of content. Anna, who said she liked more "edgy" content and had previously made a shift from following right-wing YouTubers to left-wing instead, was very clear on that not only did she like hit-pieces, but negative content had been her entry point into politics on YouTube in the first place.

"I think I started watching sort of edgy YouTubers when I was like fifteen or sixteen, and they were talking about stuff like Buzzfeed-feminism and made reaction videos to Buzzfeed videos talking about what was wrong with manspreading and stuff like that. So when I saw these videos, the Buzzfeed guys looked pretty stupid, and my attitude towards them started to change."

Later in the interview she is asked if she enjoys hit-piece content.

"Yeah, I mean… I loved that kind of videos. I think mainly it's because I have been on the other side, and I used to believe I the whole soy boy thing (internet rumor that eating soy increases men's estrogen levels) *and all that, and now I'm watching them just make fun of something I used to believe in. I think that's… I like it a lot."* -Anna, 20.

Hank also had hit-pieces as one of the main reasons for why he had started following precisely hbomberguy. He was the one who called politics on YouTube "edutainment," and said being entertained was one of the main reasons he enjoyed politics on YouTube.

"I think part of the reason why I started watching hbomberguy was because he posted a video about an English guy called Sargon of Akkad. I think he was… He joined UKIP later. And that's how I got into contact with hbomberguy and ContraPoints, and later Philosophy Tube." -Hank, 23

Helen agreed, showing both a very high level of trust in the political YouTubers she watched and a liking for hit-pieces. Even when she knows nothing about the person being talked about, she still finds herself believing the YouTuber she is watching:

"Mhm, yes, I'd say so. I have to watch those. I think drama is juicy. But it's interesting, because I've started watching a few of those videos without even knowing who the person they're talking about is, or maybe I've heard the name and know it's a bad dude, and now just let me know why. So yes, I do watch those quite a lot, it's like, I don't like to admit it, but it feels nice to see someone I think is wrong get explained by someone else why they are wrong." -Helen, 22.

Finally, Richard also said he liked hit-pieces, though with the caveat that they had to target someone relevant.

"Yes, I do. But only if they attack someone relevant. Hbomberguy, for example, has a video on Inforwars-person Paul Joseph Watson. And I really like that video because of what he talks about when he talks about Paul Joseph Watson. But if I were to watch a random left-wing youtuber who just talks about him just to say anything negative about him, about basically whatever in every single video they make, then it would get boring really quick." -Richard, 24.

Again, those who saw primarily austere channels had a different view on the matter. For them, political YouTube seemed to be less about interpersonal drama and political personalities. They instead viewed the platform as an alternative source for information, where complex ideas and theories were boiled down to a more comprehensible format. Even though they also enjoyed politics on YouTube being more entertaining than in "the real world," they would often seek out the more serious discourse than that found in hit-pieces:

-What is it about The Young Turks you don't like?
"I don't think they're very serious, they can be unreasonable. And I've become more critical to my sources. I think they're the Fox News of the left. They take a few arguments and blow them out of proportions. And they don't do a good job of getting their opinions across, they mostly just come with hateful utterances towards those who disagree with them. So it becomes very unserious."-Matthew 21.

Finally, Carl explained how he preferred serious debate, rather than trying to mock your opponent. When asked if he had a particular YouTuber he considered to be closest to his own ideals and beliefs, he chose the former TV-show host Joe Rogan:

"This is going to sound weird, but Joe Rogan, and it's really stupid, because he's not a great political thinker, but it's this core characteristic of his that I identify with more than anything else; this genuine curiosity to hear what people have to say. And that's why he's the largest podcaster in the world, not because he has the coolest guests, but because he can get everyone to present themselves from the best possible angle. And that I think is important in a democracy." -Carl, 22.

Carl and the rest of my informants who preferred Austere channels had a distinctly different approach to and understanding of what politics on YouTube was than those who preferred

Casual channels. While everyone was in agreement that the entertainment value of the political content was one of the main attractions, those who followed Austere channels were far less interested in inter-YouTuber drama. This showed itself both in their aversion to hit-pieces, as well as the levels of trust the two groups had towards political YouTubers.

4.4: Parasocial relationships and political YouTubers

"And maybe that's the danger of YouTube videos, that when you're watching YouTube videos and you start to really like a YouTuber, then it might get easier to accept their points of view or arguments without doing any critical thinking." -Mary, 24.

This is how Mary reflected on the possibility that personal feelings towards YouTubers might affect her ability to think critically about their content. I wanted to explore the possibility that parasocial relationships might be a deciding factor in why young adults choose to interact with political content on YouTube.

Parasocial relationships exist between audience and a personae on a screen. The initial paper on the phenomenon focused on TV and radio stars (Horton and Wohl, 1997), but YouTubers certainly have an advantage when it comes to creating and maintaining parasocial relationships with their audience.

One of the first barriers that needs to be broken down to create a parasocial relationship is the feeling of distance between watcher and personae. The YouTuber must be seen as a person, not merely a corporate voice. This makes parasocial relationships far more relevant when it comes to casual YouTubers than Austere.

Some of the YouTubers who do achieve at it are seen by their followers, as Eileen put it, just regular people with opinions they want to share and discuss:

"*That these are people. They are just regular people who wants to put words to what's bothering them about society, and who think it's important to talk about it."* -Eileen, 21

For Eileen to think of the political YouTubers she likes as "just regular people" is already an indication that she might be likely to develop parasocial relationships with them.

Steve pointed out how it was easier for him to have his opinions changed if he felt he was being spoken to by people, and not just someone peddling information or facts at him.

"This probably says a lot about me, but I mentioned how Jubilee (YouTube-channel) *plays a lot on people's emotions and isn't very objective, but I often end up changing opinions after having watched their videos. Because you see the people in all of it, it's not just facts."* -Steve, 23.

The types of videos the YouTubers created seemed to matter a great deal for whether or not they were successful in creating parasocial relationships with their viewers: my informants were often keener to trust Casual YouTubers compared to the Austere channels. Casual YouTubers style of talking directly to the camera, as if addressing the viewer directly, is a technique one can use to strengthen bond between content creator and watcher. Another method is inviting the viewer to the "backstage" (Aalen, 2015, p. 80), like a home, or, in many YouTuber's cases, their bedrooms. It certainly seemed to work on Helen:

"I feel they're honest. Especially those with slightly longer videos, whit a bit more nuance. I think it's about YouTubers inviting you to their home, and when they invite you to their home to talk to them you start to trust them. But, I think they're honest. I think you can trust them. That's what my gut is telling me, at least." -Helen, 22.

Another of the most common ways of creating parasocial relationships between personae and watcher is for the personae to share personal information about themselves (Ferchaud Et al., p91, 2017). A lot of the Casual YouTubers share a lot from their own personal lives, none more so than ContraPoints, who frequently talks about her own sexual encounters.

All three of the most popular YouTubers mentioned by my informants have at some point made videos in which they discuss their own sexuality. It was brought up by Eileen when she was asked what it was about Philosophy Tube she liked:

"It started with her personality, and I thought her videos were really well made. It was aesthetic and nice to look at. She's an actress, so she knows how to entertain. And she also made a video regarding her sexuality. And I myself am a bisexual woman, so after having seen her talk about her history with her own sexuality, saying she was also bisexual, I understood that this was a likeminded person. It was nice to see myself represented through her in a new and refreshing way." -Eileen, 21.

For my informants to be able to relate to the YouTuber's lived experiences seemed to really strengthen the bond between them. Anna had a deep fondness for the YouTuber "ShoeOnHead", to whom she felt a close connection. Both of them had at one point in their life identified as right-wing, at least when it came to cultural politics. This is something ShoeOnHead will allude to often in her videos, typically done in a mocking manner. She will refer to her past as "the dark ages," and says that her content from that time was "cringe." Anna seemed to think of ShoeOneHead as someone very similar to herself, pointing to both of them being girls, and that ShoeOnHead, like herself, liked edgy humor:

-ShoeOnHead, she's a very interesting character. What is it about her that you like?
"Yes! I think it's a lot of stuff, but also because she's a woman, because most politicians on YouTube

are men. So it's sort of nice to have an edgy girl who talks about things in a very funny way. And she talks about things I can relate to. Because she was also on the right around 2016, 2017, and made videos with Lauren Southern and stuff like that, I remember that very well. Yeah. So I think that what I like the most about Shoe is that she's always sort of been edgy, but that in a way she's… yeah, sort of like me, in a way." -Anna, 20.

For ShoeOnHead to be using "edgy" jokes and a casual language is another way to bolster parasocial relationships. The way the Casual YouTubers talk to their audience, which is very different from the way Austere channels talk, can matter in the creation a feeling of familiarity, and reduce the distance between watcher and performer (Ferchaud Et al., p. 90, 2017). While my informants' most popular Austere channel, Secular Talk, rarely directs himself to the viewer or acknowledges them, the most popular Casual channel, "ContraPoints," often use pet names or endearing nicknames for her followers in her videos; in her video titled "Opulence," ContraPoints refers to her followers as "gorg," a shortened version of gorgeous (ContraPoints, 2019).

One of the main components in generating a relationship between viewers and YouTuber is trust (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 28). During the interviews I saw trust manifest itself in several different forms. For example, Carl showed a great deal of trust and respect towards one of his favorite political YouTubers, Tommy Sotomayor, for going against the established norm.

"Tommy Sotomayor, he's not super famous, he talks more about cultural politics than politics, he has some serious issues with the Afro-American culture in USA, and I remember seeing a video of his in which he just sat in his car and drove and complained about problems in the culture which really got me thinking, because I've always had tremendous respect for people who go against, this sounds cliché, but people who go against… they're member of a community, but still decide to break with the established mindset of the community." -Carl, 22

Carl perceived Sotomayor to be trustworthy, which made him appreciate his content more. Trust can also have an effect on making people buy merchandise (Ferchaud et al, 2017, p 89). Most of my informants expressed that if they could afford it, they probably would have become "patreons" for their favorite channels. George's explanation was quite common:

"It's definitely something I've thought about for a while now, but the problem is I have quite a few channels I want to be a patreon for, but I don't have enough income at the moment…" -George, 25

The only real difference between the few who were patreons and those who were not, appeared to be a slight difference in financial prioritizing.

"Freedom Toons, I think. I had some financial troubles a while back, but I think I'm still a patreon for them. 5 dollars a month, I think."
-Why do you choose to be a patreon for them?
"He makes funny videos. The problem is, Freedom Toons is maybe a but further to the right, he's a catholic Christian, and more conservative on certain topics, and often then you have the problem that you don't get paid, because YouTube doesn't allow for ads on that sort of content. So I support him. I support Freedom Toons." -Theo, 22.

One important discovery made by Horton and Wohl (1956) was that the watcher would often try to engage with the personae they had developed a parasocial relationship with. However, very few of my informants ever tried to engage with the YouTubers they followed. The exception was Eileen, who left comments on the Patreon site of Philosophy Tube, but beyond that there was next to no two-way interaction between watcher and personae. YouTubers will often allude to what they are doing as "starting a conversation" (Duman and Lochler, p. 194, 2008), and encourage their viewers to leave comments in the comment section or talk to them on other platforms. One informant pointed out how her favorite political YouTuber, Philip DeFranco, often ends his videos encouraging conversation:

"it made me think of Philip DeFranco, who typically ends his videos by asking, asking the people who are watching "okay, what do you think about this?" and he encourages you to give your own feedback and think critically about what you've just heard." -Mary, 24.

It is worth noting that the way my informants spoke of the channels they followed was different depending on whether they followed Austere channels or Casual channels. We saw in the previous chapter how Theo, one of the only two who were patreons for channels they liked, said he did not wish to "worship" any channel. The reason seemed to be that those who watched a majority Austere channels were typically less interested in hearing the viewpoint of only a single person, and would rather seek out different viewpoints and stances in an attempt to educated themselves. Simply put, the way they use YouTube to engage with political content is far less compatible with the creation of parasocial relationships. With trust being such an important factor, people who are naturally skeptical of everything they are told seem like poor candidates for a parasocial relationship.

Finally, physical attraction can be a factor in creating parasocial relationships, but was never mentioned by any informant as a reason why they were subscribed to any youtuber. My informants would often refer to the aesthetic of a video, but that never seemed to mean the physical attraction of the YouTuber.

4.5: Uses for political content on YouTube

An important part of my project has been looking at how young adults use the political content they interact with on YouTube. It was my opinion going into this project that too much of the focus lay on what political content potentially could do to the viewer, instead of what the viewer might use it for instead.

As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the main reasons why my informants use YouTube for political content is because they find it entertaining. To some it is entertaining because they find politics to be entertaining. Jack, for example stated that *"for me, ideas are entertaining."* For others it was tied more into the production and the way it was presented, as. However, what I wanted to know was what uses beyond merely entertainment and information my informants thought political content on YouTube might have for them.

Building on Paul F. Lazarsfeld's theory about opinion leaders, one avenue I wanted to explore was the potential for the informants to share the political content they interacted with, with other people in their lives.

There were definitive cases of my informants trying to influence others with what they had learned from the political YouTubers they watched. Helen wanted to push for a change in her youth party's policy following what she had learned in a Philosophy Tube video:

"It was Philosophy Tube's video about sex work. Because before, typically, the left's attitude was that paying for sex shouldn't be legal, we should continue with that line, but after having seen the video I've completely changed my mind and think we should decriminalize sexwork, and sexworkers should be allowed to do what they want without the police following them around everywhere (…) So that's a video which… it made me want to change my party's policy during our national meeting. But it didn't work out, because Corona, so there was a lot less time because of Zoom, but I'll do it next time." - Helen, 22

Others would use political videos as a simple way to argue their cases. If there was a video they felt argued for a case in a good way, it was easier to just share the video than to type out the argument for themselves:

-Do you share videos with other people if you think it's something they should watch?
"It's just when… specifically when I argue with this one guy, then I might share a video from someone, ContraPoints or Philosophy Tube. I wouldn't share one of Vaush's videos with him, because this guy, he supports Trump and says Trump won the election. So you know what kind of guy he is."
-Is it so you don't have to type your own argument out? To make it easier for yourself?
"Yeah, it's like if he for example says that blacks do more crime than white, I'll just link him Shaun's Bell Curve video, and I'll say watch this, enjoy." -Hank, 23

Mary would also share videos with her friends if she thought it was important for them to see it. The video she shared with her friends were often concerned with cultural politics. It seemed like the bar for sharing cultural political content was much lower than other types of political content.

"Like when it comes to Pop Culture Detective, then I've shared some of his videos with my friends. Like that Born Sexy Yesterday, and also The Adorkable Misogyny of The Big Bang Theory. But I haven't asked if they subscribed to him or not. I've just sent them and told them that I think this is an interesting video. Or I've told them, "remember we talked about this, here's a video I saw about it a while ago."" -Mary, 24

There was, however, a lot of reluctance towards sharing anything publicly on social media. None of my informants would share anything political on their Facebook wall or anywhere similar, though informant said he had done so in the past:

"If I do share a video, I'll do it directly in a chat. I've stopped sharing on Facebook and stuff like that. I stopped because, well, I don't want to be… I mean, you often get criticized, very few people are actually going to bother watching the video or whatever you shared, so now I just share it with a friend who I know have somewhat libertarian values (…) I did it earlier on Twitter, but now I don't have a Twitter any longer. Because it's a bit like… Ben Shapiro and Dave Rubin will often criticize the people on the left for virtue signaling, and I feel like sharing libertarian videos on Twitter when no one cares also is virtue signaling, just in a different way." -Theo, 22.

Carl also said he had become more reluctant to *"push his own opinions on people"* as the years went on and he realized the world was more complex than he had thought at the fifteen.

It is not very surprising to see that few of my informants openly share videos on their social medias. There is a certain stigma tied to posting political content on your social media in Norway. A study of young people showed that there was plenty of political engagement, but fear of being criticized, fear of being exposed as unknowledgeable, and the fear of being defined as something they might not actually consider themselves to be held people back from posting (Aagre and Dizdarevic, 2020).

But, outside of entertainment and education, sharing political content with other people was not the only way it was used. It was also used for self-improvement. For example, Carl had used it to become better at winning debates, both by watching them and by exposing himself to a myriad of different opinions:

"Being on YouTube has led to me seeing a lot of different perspectives, which has helped me realize that it might not always be that easy (to convince someone), which has made me act calmer. More

reluctant to push my own opinions on people. I think people who raise their voice have already lost the debate, and it's helped me win more debates by allowing me to understand people's perspectives before they come." -Carl, 22

Steve had realized he was not able to keep up in conversations with his peers and used political YouTube to educate himself on politics.

"John Oliver was my introduction, I saw him once in high school. Our English teacher showed it to us. Then it just lay dormant there, until I started studying in [City]. I started studying to become a nurse at first and noticed I had little to contribute with when I spoke with other students about stuff, and that made me think wow, I don't know anything, so then I started to watch it." -Steve, 23.

It was not common for my informants to have actively sought out political YouTube because they desired to learn more. The usual introduction was to stumble upon it or get introduced to it via another hobby. Steve's was only one of two who had intentionally sought out politics on YouTube. Eileen also made a conscious decision to seek out political content when she realized people around her talked about it. In her case it can also be seen as a liberating act, as it helped her break with old stigma of what women can and cannot do:

"I come from a rural place, a not so progressive place. And I remember how in high school "homo" was an often-used slur, and I was very for respecting other people, so I was the class feminist, which was also a slur. So during my entire adolescence I was encouraged to be quiet, which is difficult when you're a woman and perhaps a little more finely tuned to problems in society and when you realize how chauvinistic society is (...) but then I moved away and my boyfriend introduced me to his friends, and they dared to talk about things. And then the snowball just kept rolling, and I took the initiative to teach myself, gladly via YouTube, about politics." -Eileen, 21

Despite it being unusual to have made the conscious decision to use YouTube to learn more about politics, it was not uncommon to use it to learn more about politics once they had first discovered political YouTube. Several informants reported that one of the things they liked the best about political YouTube was that it could make it easier to understand difficult concepts, or simply learn about concepts they had not heard of before. Mary said of her favorite political YouTuber, Philip DeFranco, that he had helped her understand how USA works better, Theo said it had taught him about movies and made him want to watch better films, while George attributed most of what he knew about trans people to ContraPoints:

"A lot of it comes from exposure. Exposure to new things. Like, there's a lot I learned from ContraPoints about the trans community and that experience that I just didn't know about. I

had never met a trans person. I grew up in [City], there's like seventy-thousand people there, you don't get exposed to a lot in that environment." -George, 25.

Self-discovery was also something political YouTube was used for frequently. I will cover this in greater detail in a later chapter, but for a lot of my informants, political YouTube had helped them define who they were, and what they stood for.

Political YouTube was also used quite frequently for social interactions. Several of my informants reported that when certain YouTubers they liked uploaded a new video they would watch it together with friends, just like a movie night:

-Why are you a patreon for hbomberguy?
"Well, it started because, we used to watch hbomb, me and a couple of friends, together. I lived in a collective with some guys, and all us were friends, and it was… often when we had visitors it would often line up with a new hbomb-video, and then we would watch it while eating or hanging out." -Kevin, 22

Helen, who said YouTube had had a lot to say for where she stands politically today, also said it had helped her get in contact with new people.

At the end of the day, political YouTube was primarily a learning tool, one that could present information in an exciting way. My informants were perhaps less eager to share the videos with other people than I had expected, though there were certainly times when a political YouTube video could be used as a tool in a debate. It was also a way to learn about practical politics; particularly for those active in politics it was a way to study politics in action, or a way to hone your own skills.

4.6: Shift from right-wing to left-wing, and the importance of political role models

During the interviews, eight of my informants said that they had stopped watching channels with a certain political viewpoint, before starting to watch channels on the opposite side of the political spectrum. In seven cases this meant that they had stopped watching right-wing content and turned to left-wing content instead, while one of my informants had switched from left to right, and then sought out libertarian centrist channels.

Once I noticed that this was a repeating trend after the first batch of interviews, I made a point of asking the remaining informants if they had similar experiences.

When I first discovered political YouTube it was, as so many other did at the time, through the "Feminist fail meme" videos that popped up in my recommendations. Usually when someone write about politics on YouTube or radicalization on the site, this is where they start, too. However, as one of my informants pointed out, the "Feminist fails" videos are actually

not the first, but rather the second step one can take before moving towards more over or extreme right-wing content:

"I think it's worth mentioning that YouTubers, like the more edgy YouTubers back in 2015 and 2016, like typically Shoe (ShoeOnHead), *ChrisRayGun, h3h3Productions, who at the time made videos about Buzzfeed feminism (...)"* -Anna, 20.

The channels Anna mentions were at the height of the popularity back in 2015-2016. Coincidentally, this was also the time when a lot of my informants started watching YouTube or take an interest in politics.

On YouTube, different types of content will become popular for a period, before quickly dying out again. This applies to non-political and political YouTubers alike. Around 2015-2016 it just so happened that criticizing "Buzzfeed-feminism" was a highly popular type of content. For example, on the 17th of December, 2016, h3h3Productions uploaded a video called "Buzzfeed Hates Men" in which the channel's hosts ridicule a BuzzFeed video talking about manspreading (h3h3Productions, 2016). Though seemingly innocuous on its own, videos like this became an entry point for Anna into more extreme right-wing content:

"I don't remember what channels I watched in the beginning, because at the time videos just showed up on YouTube thanks to the algorithm, and it was stuff like "Crazy SJW gets wrecked by facts and logic number 17," that type of videos. I think maybe the first one I started watching was Milo (Yiannopoulos), *because I remember at least this one video that showed up on YouTube by a YouTuber called Blair White, where she talks about… I don't remember quite what it was, but it was one of the videos where Milo goes to a university in the US just to talk there, and there was a pretty large SJW mob who started interrupting and stuff like that. Even though he thought he had come to talk about politics, at least because the right has this rhetoric about them being all about the civil debate and all that, while the left just sits there and screech and so on, so I got the mindset eventually that that's what it's actually like."* -Anna, 20

Even though Anna was the only one to name non-political channels as her entry point into political YouTube, several other informants spoke of channels that first got them interested in politics, before settling for different channels, almost as if there is a trial period for most of them, during which they try to find the right content for them. Matthew explains how he found political YouTube when he was young and very opinionated, but lacked the facilities for critical thinking:

"I guess maybe around 9th grade? So In 2014."

-Did something happen then to make you interested in politics?

"Good question. I think it was a gradual development. I started out by having a lot of opinions, as young people do, and then it turned into… I had looked into what I wanted to do and considered it my civic duty to read up on all the parties, so I got gradually more and more interested in Norwegian politics, and then it gradually shifted over to American politics, because that's more action packed." -Matthew, 21

When asked if this means that he had a shift from right to left, he says yes, but makes sure to point out that only as far as cultural politics were concerned: when it came to financial politics he had always remained left-wing.

Kevin also spoke of his early years on YouTube as a time when he was not quite certain where he stood politically, and ended up following a lot of channels that he now disagrees with:

"I guess I've been watching politics on YouTube since roughly 2012, 2013, something like that. I remember the earliest channel I saw was this guy who uploaded a debate he had had in a comment section with a homophobic guy, so you know it's going to be good. "fags go to hell," all that. I guess I was 12 or 13. And I grew up with homo as a slur, so it was about then I decided I should reconsider some things about myself, and not be a part of a larger problem (…) so I was exposed to an anti-religious, atheist society on YouTube early on. TJ Kirk ("The Amazing Atheist" on YouTube) *and some other guys whose names I don't remember. Then all of those guys took a sharp right turn shortly after. I don't know what happened there. (…)"*

-Did you follow the channels to the right, or did you drop them?

"I think that, as a 14-15 year old I was at a more edgy, libertarian point in my life, where… I don't really have a good argument as to why, except that I was a 14-year-old boy full of hormones and didn't know who I was or what I wanted. So, I don't know, I just listened to the voices around me. I've always been rather anti-authoritarian, anti-racist, against most forms of oppression. I just didn't have a very nuanced view of the world when I was 14." -Kevin, 22.

Steve also explained the channels he used to watch back in 2016 as *"A lot of rubbish on the right. I was very fond of Milo Yiannopoulos and Ben Shapiro when I was younger. And, yeah, a lot of YouTubers from that gang."* There was a persistent tendency to refer to a past self like a different person, someone who had not quite yet found out where they wanted to go with their life. It was not the informant who had followed these YouTube-channels, it was someone young and foolish, a person they had once been, but was not any longer. Becoming who they are today, watching the channels that they do, has been a maturing process, a natural evolution. As Gripsrud (2011, p. 26) noted, we never seize working on our identity, constantly

finding new people to identify with. Hank reflects on it like someone remembering a dark and shameful past.

"I've been watching politics on YouTube since 2014. So, you know, the bad years of politics on YouTube. And my process was that back then I followed a lot of channels which I disagree with politically today, and I don't like how they, sort of, advocate for their beliefs, and I found the channels that I watch today by watching response-videos to the channels I watched back then." -Hank, 23.

Carl had a very interesting view on his past with more controversial content online, not just on YouTube. Carl watched YouTubers on both the right and left in order to ensure he got exposed to more than one viewpoint. Due to his past experiences, he felt he was able to keep himself in check, and prevent himself from falling into enticing rabbit holes:

"Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad/Akkad Daily on YouTube). *He has a network of people he works with. But he was bigger back in 2016, 2017, now everything's mostly fallen apart, with extremely right-wing culture political critics, like Paul Joseph Watson and a swede called "The Golden One" and people who just think feminism is the reason they can't get laid. And it was fun to watch it, but YouTube deplatformed and drove them apart (...) And I don't agree with any of this, but I think it's nice to be challenged on the fundamental stuff. I had a period in 2014-2015 when I flirted with "The intellectual dark web," a lot of 4chan and hatred towards women and Jews, racism, which I got over completely naturally, which is a good thing, but I noticed how incredibly tempting and fun it is to think like that. So it's a slippery slope, so that's why I like to stand on the top of that hill, so that I'm always alert and competent enough to resist the temptation to just back into that sort of simple, but fun worldview."* -Carl, 22.

The informants' past, when they engaged with completely different political content than they do now, becomes an essential part of their current understanding of themselves, an important tool for them to separate the sort of political content and opinions they are okay with, and the kind they disagree with.

Among my informants, Theo had the most unique past. he had started out following channels on the left, then shifted over to the right, before eventually finding his home among the libertarian centrists.

"Yes, like I said, what I started with was The Young Turks and Secular Talk, who's closely connected to The Young Turks. They made me interested in the every-day politics of USA (...) in 2016 I became interested due to the conflict, so I first saw a video or two of Dave Rubin, saw that it was interesting, because those people The Young Turks had criticized, they seemed far more reasonable than the parody The Young Turks had presented. Maybe. At least when you could hear them talk in a 50 minute

interview. And then I've maybe gone over to Sam Harris on my own, his own podcast instead of watching Rubin, and maybe go to Crowder or Shapiro instead of watching Rubin, so I'm slowly drifting towards the primary sources. But now I'm not watching that anymore. So you could say I've jumped from the left in USA to the right in USA, and now I'm a libertarian." -Theo, 22.

For Theo, his past experiences with politics on YouTube were presented as more of a part of the current *him*, where it had all been part of his journey to discover where he truly belonged. Now he would occasionally keep himself updated on what happened on both the right and the left, saying *"from time to time I check out The Young Turks to see what they're talking about, what's happening on the left at the moment, and what's happening in Crowder's universe. But not that often."* But for the most part, Theo, despite also having shifted between political factions on YouTube, had had a very different experience than the rest of my informants who also had needed time to figure out where they belonged politically.

One very interesting thing was revealed to my when I started prodding the informants who had made a switch in political stance about their past; they made a sharp distinction between cultural politics and politics of economy. Despite watching a lot of channels on the political right and agreeing with a lot of what they said, my informant seemed to regard what they said as only relevant as far as cultural politics went. The sense I got from them was that the YouTubers on the right were considered correct on topics regarding movies and other cultural expressions, but were disregarded when it came in matters relating to financial and legislative politics. Though the informants agreed with their view on culture, it did not affect who they were planning to vote for. For example, Richard, who is a member of a left-wing political party, said:

"I follow YouTubers I agree with a lot more than those I don't. So I stick close to those who are on the same ideological plan as I am – but my ideological plan has changed over the years, which has reflected what YouTubers I've watched."
-A switch from right to left?
"From right to left. Not in active politics, but in philosophy and theory. There I've had a shift from right to left." -Richard, 24

Anna, the only woman to have previously watched primarily right-wing content, said the same; even though she watched some of the most demonized right-wing political YouTubers the site has ever hosted, she was still voting for the Labor party in Norway:

"I was just thinking about how I was still a member of AUF (Labour Youth Party) even though I watched conservative YouTubers like Ben Shapiro and Paul Joseph Watson, and even though I had a

very culture conservative view, it was the economical that influenced my decision, because I voted Labor at, you know, the first election I could vote in, even though I still had some of the culture conservative views in the back of my head. So I think… I don't think it matters too much for Norwegian elections, the YouTubers I watch." -Anna, 20

Hank agrees. Even though his first experience with political YouTube was with the right-wing, he never wavered when it came to who he would vote for:

"American conservatives aren't like normal conservatives. But I do feel I've gotten a different perspective [on conservatives]. Maybe I didn't discover the political right on YouTube with the same basis as most, but when I discovered it I was still… I would've still voted for The Labor Party, I was for equality and generally left-wing values, but I didn't see, I didn't see anyone on YouTube who expressed it in a good way, and then came these people and said "hey, I'm for equality and... freedom of expression, but these Muslims…" I consumed it uncritically. And it was just when I started to think critically about it I decided that this guy (Sargon of Akkad/Akkad Daily) isn't as moderate as he claims. He's right-wing." -Hank, 23.

What Hank says here is important: he could not find any left-wing YouTubers that he liked. It seems the reason why so many ended up watching right-wing content, despite considering themselves to be left-wing, was because they could not find any interesting YouTubers on the left for them to follow. Several informants spoke similarly of right-wing YouTubers today, saying they had not managed to find any channels on the political right that they liked, and therefore ended up only watching channels on the left. Matthew said *"if I had found a right-wing channel that covers my interests, where you're not slapped across the face with politics, but which instead is analytical, then that would've been cool."*

The lack of "cool" and relatable YouTubers on the political left drove the informants towards the right. In 2016, none of the most popular channels on the left had yet managed to find their style, if they even existed in the first place. Meanwhile, channels on the right produced immensely popular content, in which they would ridicule their political opponents, while maintaining a cool and level head. Kevin explains how, despite him considering himself a leftist, it took youtuber who used similar techniques to those on the right for him to start watching leftist YouTubers:

"I've always had a very left-wing view on politics, really. When I voted for the first time in 2013 I voted for SV (Socialist left-wing party). *So I've always been consistent there. But a buddy of mine dredged up a YouTube video called… it must've been "Cultural Marxism, a measured response"* (hbomberguy video). *From before he had any production technique. And up until then my line of thought had been that I wanted to agree with the left, but the right had the best arguments, who were*

the most rational and who didn't get emotional or angry whenever they were met with resistance, and… that might just be the image the right wanted to project, and it worked, but then comes good old Harry Brewis (hbomberguy) *and just gave a calm, funny, and very well thought through deconstruction of all these coocoo right-wing conspiracy theories. And it was very refreshing to, well, see someone be rational and be right at the same time. So that's where it started, for me. That's when I started to look more at left-wing online."* -Kevin, 22.

Hank also wanted to find someone on the left he could relate to and identify with, but instead ended up following Sargon of Akkad. At the time, Sargon had presented himself as left-wing, or, at the very least as a centrist, and was one of the most well-known political YouTubers.

-You mean Sargon?
"Yes, him specifically, because I remember a period early on when he say "I am on the left," and that was really what made me think "oh, he's on the left, he's critical of the same people I'm not certain of myself either," so that made me follow him, but when I got exposed to different views I thought "this is stupid, actually."" -Hank, 23.

Anna showed how her political views became tied to her sense of her own identity and how this was reflected in what YouTube channels she watched. Even though it was feminism that first got her interested in politics, she worried about being perceived as uncool if she stayed on the political left. Not until she discovered channels on the left she felt were cool did she feel it was acceptable to align herself with the left as far as cultural politics was concerned.

"When I started to watch YouTube, back in 2016, it was the conservatives who dominated politics on YouTube. It was, how do I put it, it wasn't cool to be on the left."
-What happened to make you shift from right to left?
"Well, because I started watching… in addition to the more conservative channels, I started watching channels like ShoeOnHead, and another channel called Easy on Me. He was important for me, because he was the first to criticize YouTubers like Milo and Steven Crowder and said that they were wrong. And that surprised me, because these people were supposed to be the rational ones, and so on. But then you learn that they do stupid things, too, because… then I realized they didn't have as good rhetoric as I thought. And then I started watching more videos that made fun of Ben Shapiro, and… it made a big impression on me, because I'd always thought he was so good at debating and so on, but he just uses the same rhetoric tricks all the time, and he's not actually that good at debating. So then I switched over."-Anna, 20.

Eventually, the left became "cool" on YouTube. Following the election of Trump in 2016, a lot of new political YouTubers sprung up, while old channels settled into what would become their style going forward; Philosophy Tube and hbomberguy steadily improved their artform

and editing skills to make their videos more appealing to a wider audience, Lindsay Ellis truly found her style with the video essay format, and a sub-genre of edgier channels, like Hasan Abi, Vaush, and Xanderhall were born, or grew in popularity.

There is one video from ContraPoints I feel is vital to mention here. Along with YouTube taking steps to remove unwanted political content, much of which was right-wing, I believe it is the most important factor to consider when trying to understand why the political left on YouTube suddenly became "cool".

In her video "The Left", ContraPoints discusses why the left on YouTube has been unable to excite their audience in the same way as the right has. Natalie Wynn plays all the characters in the video herself, which for the most part is structured like a conversation between a communist catgirl (a human girl with prosthetic cat ears and fangs, who mimic the demeanor of a cat) and a less radical leftist, whose demeanor is close enough to the regular Wynn, I will refer to her as thus for convenience sake.

The video starts at a speak-easy, where "a fascist" is welcomed to the stage. This fascist (played by Wynn) then proceeds to wow her "fellow Americans" with her speech, warning them against a "cabal of global elites." After the fascist leaves the stage, "a leftist" is welcomed to the stage. This leftist, the same catgirl who later speaks to Wynn, is booed off stage after presenting difficult philosophical concept, starting her speech with "actually, according to Hegel…"

In the following conversation between the catgirl and Wynn, Wynn tries to get across that the left must abandon their current rhetoric, but not the ideas. "I'm not talking about getting rid of Marx, I'm talking about giving him a makeover." She then tries to explain to the Antifa catgirl that the best way to defeat the fascists is not by "punching them," but by getting people on their side, which "you're not going to do by tweeting death threats and communist propaganda, using words like dialectic, and telling everyone to read obscure European philosophers with unpronounceable names and unintelligible ideas."

After giving the catgirl a chance to explain that Antifa does far more than just punch Nazis, Wynn returns to her original point, about how the left has been far too esoteric in their attempts to sway the masses, saying: "My point is, you can't just win the war in the street. You also have to win the war in the heart and the mind (…) what the left needs to get, and what the centrists need to get, and what only I and the fascists seem to understand is that reason doesn't matter very much. What is it that centrists hate about social justice warriors? It's not that they don't have good reason in support of their arguments. It's that they're not cool, right? Social justice warriors are not cool."

When her catgirl friend asks what it means to be cool, Wynn explains it thus:

"Cool means calm, detached, and in control of yourself. And the leading complaint about social justice warriors is that they're emotional. The social justice warriors who everyone cringes at online are people who I'm sure are nice people, who were having a bad moment, and they're caught on camera in the middle of an outburst. They're out of control. And that's the problem. They're not cool" (ContraPoints, 2017).

This is one of the oldest videos on ContraPoints' channel, and perfectly sums up what I believe was the issue a lot of young people had with the left at the time; though they might have agreed with them at the core principles, the way the information was presented left a lot to be desired. At the same time, the political right consisted of young, interesting, and talented people who knew what they were doing, and, perhaps, who shared some of the concerns my informants had. My informants were just starting to develop an interest in politics and were looking for role models. They were pushed towards the right because that's where best content creators at the time was.

The reason I believe this video by ContraPoints is so important is because of the time it came out. Released right at the start of 2017, it followed in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. In every single interview, 2016 was at some point referenced, either directly or indirectly. It was either the year when my informants first became interested in politics, the year they discovered political YouTube, or the year they switched from one side of political YouTube to another.

As we saw in previous chapters, entertainment was a key factor in why they enjoy political content on YouTube, and everyone found American politics to be highly relevant for them. A possible explanation for why could be because they first started to take notice of politics during the buildup to the 2016 presidential election.

I can only theorize on this, but it is possible that my informants had their impression of politics as a field changed by that election, which gave us a new "superstar politician" (Street, 2019, p. 4) and as Matthew said, more action-packed politics than what we commonly see.

4.7: Confirmation bias and algorithmic interference

I wanted to get a better understanding for how my informants found new content to watch. The answers I was given were usually either that they had been recommended to them by YouTube's algorithm, they were recommended by a channel they already followed, or a combination of the two. For example, when asked how he had managed to find such small channels as Curio and Maggie Mae Fish, both of whom were below one hundred thousand

subscribers at the time of the interview, George said:

"Yeah, I especially remember when it comes to Curio, a lot of the content they make is similar to what I was already watching, so it just showed up in my recommendations. An example of the algorithm doing its job."

Either way, this resulted in my informants almost exclusively watching content that confirmed their beliefs. Both Jack and Theo used a particular word that gives me a good indication for why the informants may choose only to follow channels they find themselves agreeing with:

"But Secular Talk and Jellybean (Jellybean Gen), *I usually agree with them. So that might be the reason for why I'm following them.*

-You're following them because…

"Because I agree with them. I get conformation from them, I guess you could say." -Jack, 23

"So yeah, in actuality I do follow a lot of libertarian channels because obviously I liked to receive confirmation, or get patted on the… preaching to the choir, and I'll be the choir." -Theo, 22

"Confirmation bias", writes Oswald and Grosjean (2004, p. 79) means that information is searched for, interpreted, and remembered in such a way that it systematically impedes the possibility that the hypothesis could be rejected – that is, it fosters the immunity of the hypothesis." It is often an unintended act and occurs when people try to confirm a hypothesis rather than trying to falsify it. In academia it is a false way of looking for information, while in people's day to day lives, it is tied to seeking out information that says what you already believe, while ignoring information that challenges you. Henley (2014, p. 219) explains that there are two different types of reasoning: exploratory and motivated. Exploratory reasoning would be ideal when dealing with political content, as "it seeks to survey the relevant evidence concerning an issue to discover the best supported conclusion" (Ibid, p. 219). Unfortunately, reasoning in the political sphere is more often motivated. In motivated reasoning, we "seek to justify prior beliefs or desired actions by selective use of evidence or arguments biased in favor of the sought outcome, while ignoring or discounting factors that point in a different direction" (Ibid, p. 219).

It was common for my informants to say that they did not want to watch content from their political opposition. Several times my informants referred to listening to someone they disagreed with as tiresome or frustrating work:

"I'll admit that probably like them better because they agree with me. I don't think I would've liked them if they disagreed with me. It's tiresome to listen to someone who you disagree with all the time.

So it's a big plus that they agree with me." -Matthew, 21

Kevin also stated that watching content he disagreed with felt "like torturing himself," while Anna felt the political right-wing on YouTube was dishonest, and said she did not like their audience:

"I don't follow a lot of them, you know, right-wing channels any longer. They don't appeal to me, because of my values. And they… They've been caught lying several times, so I don't want to watch them, especially considering how unpleasant their audience is." -Anna, 20

This made me wonder, why do people feel such an aversion towards watching political content that they do not agree with? Oswald and Grosjean (2004, p.82) offer an explanation, saying that the possibility of rejecting personally held beliefs can lead to anxiety or other negative emotions. It is quite literally distressing to be forced to come to terms with the possibility that we might be in the wrong about our own personal beliefs.

The "cure" for motivated reasoning is exploratory reasoning. In exploratory reasoning we allow ourselves to consider various possible accounts or explanations. A common misconception is that we must abandon all prior held beliefs in exploratory reasoning, which is not true, nor possible. Our prior knowledge is essential to in order to put new information in perspective and to draw our own conclusions, but exploratory reasoning allows our prior knowledge to be impacted by new evidence and arguments (Henley, 2014, p. 220). "When we engage in exploratory reasoning, we attempt to evaluate the reliability and strength of the new evidence and the force of the new arguments independently from prior beliefs" (Ibid. p. 220).

When it came to my informants, the more Austere channels they watched and followed, the more likely were they to engage in exploratory reasoning. Take for example Richard, who watched about an equal amount of Austere and Casual channels. When asked if he ever found himself changing his opinions about anything after having seen a video, said:

"I would say so, but it might take a while, without me really noticing it. Someone might mention an argument, and then, five days later or so, I start to think over what it was they said, instead of me just being convinced there and then. It's often like, if I hear an argument that I don't agree with, but which I find interesting enough for me to want to explore further, I'll try to find other people who talk about the same subject, and if they find say something which sounds about similar, then I'll start to get convinced." -Richard, 24.

This stood in stark contrast to most of those who watched primarily Casual channels. For them it was not common to have their opinions changed on matters. Instead, they often spoke of having their own beliefs defined for them or getting new opinions on matters they

previously knew little about. Mary, who had only ever watched left-wing content, said one of the channels she watched had taught her about sexual assaults against men, something she had not previously known anything about:

"(…)And the same with Pop Culture Detective, like yesterday for example, he has these videos on sexual assault of men played for laughs. And I saw part two, where he talks about female perpetrators. So it wasn't necessarily like his video made me change my point of view, but rather it opened my eyes to how things actually are. Or, realized, well, realized how many hurtful points of view, or at least view points that I don't support, or I've overlooked because they're everywhere in media. So it's been more about becoming conscious of the matter." -Mary, 24

George also spoke of not having his opinions challenged or altered by the political YouTubers he watched, but rather refined and pushed back to him:

"There's definitely certain time, because I like them (the YouTubers he follows) *when it has given more weight to their opinions, not necessarily pushed me in a certain direction, but mostly it's because I don't get my opinions changed, but rather get them reformulated and pushed back to me."* -George, 25

Of course, those who at some point have changed political sides have had their opinions changed, but instead of this being small, single video events where they had their views on a singular matter challenged, it was instead a complete overhaul of their entire beliefs about, in particular, cultural politics. However, feeling like a part of one side of the political specter may also lead to confirmation bias, as groups tend to develop stereotypes about members of other groups (Henley, 2014, p. 221).

It is this confirmation bias many fear can lead people into a radicalizing spiral on YouTube. This was one of the points made by Lewis in her 2019 report for Data and Society, where she showed how, once you started watching content from the "alternative influence network," it was easy to move on to more extreme content by simply following the recommendations you were given by YouTube. Put differently; if you sought out only the same type of content, the worry is that you will eventually end up watching the more extreme versions of that content.

Though there were a few cases of people having been shown channels by other people they knew, like Eileen saying her boyfriend had introduced her to some, for the most part my informants reported finding channels through recommendations by channels they already followed and trusted, or they appeared in the recommended section. According to Lewis, this could mean my informants have been gradually pushed towards more extreme political

content, or at least more overtly political channels. For example, Steve found a political channel through a channel whose main content was football:

-The channel Talking Politics, it's a very small channel, do you remember how you found it?
"I talked about Tifo-Football. And that's actually how I subscribed to that channel too, because they had a lot of channels they collaborated with on YouTube. And now I follow them on Spotify. Talking politics has become a podcast. But yeah, that's how it went, I followed Tifo-football, and then Tifo made a collab video with Talking Politics about how Brexit will affect football, how financial uselessness affect football, how does Corona affect football, and then I started watching Talking Politics, and listen to them on Spotify." -Steve, 24.

Theo was not quite sure when asked, but thought it most likely he had discovered new channels via either recommendations by a channel he already followed, or via YouTube's algorithms recommending them:

-How did you find Freedom toons? It's not a very big channel.
"I'm not sure, really. Probably got a recommendation to a one minute video up as a recommendation at some point when I was in the Ben Shapiro, Crowder universe, and then I saw that, and then I just started following him, most likely. Actually, not sure. That's what I think happened. Either that, or Reason and FEE have collaborated and I've seen the series he had on Fee and then gone over to his channel. Something like that." -Theo

The answers given regarding how the informants came across new channels to watch were very homogenous, regardless of past experiences with politics on YouTube, and of ideological standings. In most cases, political YouTube channels were not something my informants sought by their own volition, but rather something they had "stumbled upon." This is similar to the "news finds me" tactic, which is an incidental way of being exposed to news or political content (Song, Zúñiga and Boomgaarden, p. 50, 2020). In today's highly mediated society, people often consume news and political content without being aware that they are doing it (ibid, p. 48). As we saw in the previous chapter, the entry point into political YouTube was for many of my informants not through overtly political channels, but rather via an internet meme or a different hobby altogether. Song, Zúñiga and Boomgaarden are skeptical of the "News find me" tactic as a way of becoming more informed, saying "citizens may perceive themselves to be well informed despite not seeking political information as actively as they should" (p. 47). However, this is still interaction with political content, and should, as Kaun writes, be counted among their civic experiences (Kaun, 2012, p. 255). Even if interacting with political content does not give comprehensive knowledge on politics, it still

seems to have made my informants more aware about a lot of issues they were unlikely to learn about elsewhere.

Part 5: Discussion

In this part I have further analyzed and discussed my findings from the interviews. By using theories presented in part two, I have tried to further explain the meanings and implications of my findings. This part is divided into three parts, each focusing on its own aspect of my findings. These are:

YouTube makes politics entertaining and fun for those who might not otherwise have had an interest in it.

Politics on YouTube is more than just far-right content.

Political YouTube is a place to develop new relationships.

5.1: YouTube can make politics entertaining and fun for those who might not otherwise have had an interest in it

One of the main takeaways from my interviews was that my informants considered politics on YouTube to be a lot more entertaining and fun than traditional politics in the offline world, which they often referred to as "the real world." YouTube is an easy entry point into the world of politics, allowing my informants to investigate different corridors of politics than what they felt they normally could through mainstream media. With its much shorter history as a medium for political content and as a platform for debates, YouTube allows for a great deal of freedom for the individual content creator. This level of freedom can, as we saw in the case of Donald Trump (Street, 2019, p. 7), allow actual politicians to explore new tactical approaches to elections.

What I think is important to consider is, what are the consequences of politics on YouTube being this level of entertaining? Are there any positive or negative attributes to politics on YouTube that are not found in "the real world"?

The best place to turn for answers is Van Zoonen's book on politics as entertainment. Since the introduction of the TV, politics has undoubtedly changed. If it changed for the better or worse is a matter of perspective, but it certainly did change. In 2005, Van Zoonen (p. 2-3) said that politics of that time had to compete for people's attention with a large offer of diversions, both mediated and unmediated. This competition can hardly be said to have improved in politics' favor as the media the last sixteen years. Politics cannot survive a war with entertainment, and so, its only way forwards is to embrace the possibilities entertainment has to offer (Ibid, p. 3).

Van Zoonen says that politics was portrayed by the media as a soap opera (2005, p. 20). Political events are portrayed through a continuous narrative, with dramatic or scandalous

events functioning as episodes. The main actors in the soap, the politicians, are generally not a well-liked group of people (Ibid, p. 5). The media typically portray them as they would do characters in a soap; flawed, vindictive, willing to do anything to save their own image. "Normal people" cannot relate to them, because we consider ourselves to be good, kind people (ibid, p. 30). Therefore it can be difficult to feel represented by politicians than it is to feel represented by and relate to political YouTubers.

Though politicians often try to make themselves more likeable by acting more like celebrities performing politics (Street, 2019, p. 4), political YouTubers, especially the Casual YouTubers, were more entertaining for my informants because of a few key factors: their personalities were considered more enjoyable, they build closer bonds with the viewers and come across as "just normal people," and the political content they cover is more entertaining than that of traditional politicians. When it came to the political content being more enjoyable, there were two major reasons why: the perception that politics on YouTube is more inclusive of different ideas and allows for more voices to be heard, and that politics on YouTube covers cultural politics, which was perceived to be internationally important. Political YouTubers also incorporate pop culture into their own content and use it to promote their own ideas and political stances. That way they are not competing as much for viewers time with other types of audio-visual entertainment, because their content can be entertaining on its own.

Political YouTubers also have a massive advantage over traditional politicians when it comes to coming across as a "regular person." What makes someone a "regular person" is different depending on context, but it is contrasted by what people think of as a "politician," to the point where politicians now are hesitant to label *themselves* as politicians (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 5). Instead, they try to find a balance between a life as a serious politician and as a unique individual (Ibid, p. 69). Top US politicians seem to have recognized that YouTube can be a way to access more people and showcase themselves as relevant and in touch with contemporary culture; both Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ihlan Omar of the Democratic Party have played Among Us, a popular whodunit-style video game, with several of the political YouTubers mentioned in this paper on a livestream. It might be a good idea for politicians to get friendly with those YouTubers, too: it was clear from my interviews that my informants had a great deal more trust towards the YouTubers they followed than actual politicians, showing the most distrust towards politicians and political YouTubers they disagreed with politically.

For most of my informants, Culture War issues was the entry point to and main appeal of politics on YouTube, which was not surprising. Political YouTubers' content focuses primarily on American cultural politics. There is very little information to be gained about what is going on in closer to home. Therefore, the politics discussed is seen as part of a wider narrative, in which they do not only matter for the US, but the entirety of western civilization. My informants universally agreed that the cultural politics discussed mattered a great deal for them, because of the high influence America has on the rest of the world.

There can be several reasons why they would feel the Culture War issues were relevant for them. Firstly, it is a matter of perspective; Hunter (1991, p. 32) explains them as "discussions about what is fundamentally right or wrong about the world we live in – about what is good and what is ultimately intolerable in our communities." When Hunter wrote his book, "communities" were far smaller than they are today: communities are no longer limited by geographical borders, and often exist solely online. We use media to connect with, understand, and position ourselves within these societies (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 34-35). What is still true is that people desire to preserve their communities, even if they are what Gripsrud calls "imagined communities". In an imagined community you feel an attachment to the other members of that community based on shared interests or ideals (Ibid, p. 18). When my informants said that the political issues discussed were important to them, it is most likely due to the feeling of being in a community with the people it affects. A subject that concerned most of my informants were laws and rights regarding sexuality, gender, and trans people. This was despite most of them not themselves being LGBT+. They might instead feel like a part of the community because it is such a major talking point within the left-wing community and equal rights is the highest point on the agenda, or they could know LGBT+ people.

Not everyone in my study were *as* interested in social and cultural politics; those who primarily followed Austere channels were less likely to speak of politics regarding sex and gender, put they did also enjoy political content that focused on pop culture.

The common criticism leveled against popular media as a platform for political content is that it does not lead to further political action, and does not lead to informed citizens, but rather citizens who wrongly perceive themselves as informed (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 11-12). But there is no evidence, says Van Zoonen, supporting the theory that citizens become less informed and apathetic because of infotainment (p. 11). Several of my informants reported being more politically active now than they had been before they started watching political content on YouTube. The reason, I believe, is because my informants are not substituting

political content they would consume elsewhere with political content on YouTube. Instead, they are substituting watching traditional entertainment with entertaining content that also teaches them about politics.

Using entertainment to learn about politics is not a new concept: Van Zoonen (p. 128-133) brings up several examples of TV and films being used by people to get a better understanding of how the political system works. I find it extremely unlikely that when people sit down to watch a TV-show like "The West Wing" or "House of Cards" they are doing that instead of reading up on political theory. What they are substituting it with are other forms for non-political entertainment. They are making a deliberate choice to engage with political content, but not at the expense of different political content. If anything, it only ever seemed to function as a springboard for them to seek out more political content; several informants said YouTube videos often made him curious to learn more, causing him to seek out more information on a subject.

Furthermore, my informants showed a strong desire only to watch quality content they felt certain was professionally made, with verifiability being an important point. YouTubers who referred to the sources they had used were considered particularly reliable, which I believe was due to most of my informants currently being or recently having been students. However, it does point towards my informants not consuming all content uncritically, as some of them reported having done in the past. A few channel choices notwithstanding, my informants were all conscious about who it was they were watching, and considered both what the YouTuber's ethos was, and their potential motivations for creating the content they did.

The content creators on YouTube are not going to be neutral. Even the channel that comes closest to being truly neutral, Philip DeFranco, clearly takes sides in matters regarding social or cultural politics. A potential issue we face then is: can we trust the YouTubers to be reliable sources of information regarding politics?

To a certain degree, I would argue that we can. The reason is because of the way political YouTube works as a network. Saastad (2020) looked at what rhetoric tools the political influencers (what I call political YouTubers) used to persuade audiences, or at least front their message. He found, like I mentioned earlier, that the most common type of video is the response video. Either a response to something that has happened, or a response to another YouTuber's response to something. Combined with the competitiveness of political YouTubers always attempting to "one-up" their opposition, and YouTube's crackdown on channels that spread misinformation (YouTube, 2021), there is now a built-in failsafe against

falsified information. Several of my informants had stopped watching channels that spread hateful message after being exposed to, through YouTube' own algorithmic recommendation system, channels that corrected or ridiculed the channels they had watched in the past, and then proceeded to provide information in a more serious and academic manner.

I am not advocating for declaring YouTube completely healthy just yet. There are still many content creators on the site who I believe can cause harm to the public debate, a few of whom were mentioned during the interviews as well. YouTube should also be criticized for how long time some of their decisions have taken.

However, caution must be used when swinging the proverbial "banhammer," for it can be a double-edged sword. Even Google are unlikely to ever scrub the internet completely free of extremist content. At least on YouTube it is guaranteed to face backlash and can be moderated. We have seen as recently as last year what happens when extremist content is moved from the public web to darker corners of the web. When Q-anon was banned from 4chan, they fled to the (even) less moderated 8chan, where the Q-anon forum soon became the most popular on the entire website. From there, it grew to become an international phenomenon, captivating millions of people into believing a wild conspiracy theory (Q: Into the Storm, 2021).

Online radicalization remains an unresolved issue, one we might not be able to reach a satisfying solution to in the foreseeable future. It is a problem across all of the internet, not just YouTube, and has been for some time now. But while certain sites cannot be said to bring much positive to the table, political content on YouTube was shown to have a lot of positive attributes for my informants, beyond learning about politics. To them, it was a site for attaining new knowledge and gaining new skills, not at the expense of news consumption, but as an added bonus. Most of my informants mentioned getting local news from other sources, with the national broadcaster NRK being the most frequently mentioned source.

Finally, even though YouTube was used to learn about political concept and theories, and functioned as a source for political news, it did not seem to affect people's choice in who they were going to vote for. Whether they watched right- or left-wing content, who they wanted to vote for and where they considered themselves to be on the political spectrum remained unchanged. Not until they started watching political content that aligned with what they perceived to be their own political standing did it lead to any further action. Once they had settled into watching political content they felt aligned with their own beliefs they were far more likely to share the content with other people, or join political parties. The more extreme

content inspired very little civic action, online or offline, compared to the more deliberative content they watched later in life.

5.2: Politics on YouTube is more than just far-right content.

Over the years, partially due to YouTube's actions taken against what they deem to be problematic content, the left-wing of political YouTube has grown exponentially in size, while the right-wing has seen several prominent figures leave the platform, or have their content demonetized (Coaston, 2018, Hollister, 2021). When it came to my informants right-wing content seemed to be something they grew out of as they got older. None of my informants reported a single major event that caused them to suddenly break with the right-wing YouTubers they had followed. Though some had gone very deep into the "alternative influence network" (Lewis, 2019) and reported having been subscribed to content creators with some extreme views, like Milo Yiannopolus and Stefan Molyneux, they all eventually abandoned them in favor of more moderate left-wing YouTubers.

In this chapter I have tried to clarify what exactly constitutes as "extremist content" on YouTube and the internet, I have explained why I believe right-wing content was so popular with young adults early in their political lives, and I will explain the importance of political identity politics for young adults.

In a video titled "Hate Speech Policy: YouTube Community Guidelines" uploaded onto YouTube's own channel, YouTube explains their rulebook for what content they consider to be hate speech, and subsequently remove: *"We remove content promoting violence or hatred against members of protected groups, including, but not limited to: race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation"* (YouTube Creators, 2019). This is very similar to Norway's law against racism, paragraph 185, which states that whoever publicly distribute or express discriminating or hateful utterances can be punished by up to three years in prison. By discriminating or hateful utterances, the law refers to making threats or insults, promote hatred or persecution based on someone's national or ethnical origin, color of their skin, religion or devotion, sexual orientation, sex or gender, or any mental disabilities (lovdata.no, §185, 2005).

The US, however, does not have any laws specifically regarding hate-speech (ala.org, 2017). However, there are a few limitations to US free speech, despite the first amendment giving very reigns to US citizens. One can for example "not incite actions that would harm others" (United States Court, n.d.), nor is defamation considered protected speech (LawShelf.com, 2021). The FBI also have their own classification of what they consider hate crimes.

Traditionally, their interpretation of what constituted as a “hate crime” included “crimes in which the perpetrators acted based on a bias against the victim’s race, color, religion, or national origin.” In 2009, “the Bureau became authorized to also investigate crimes committed against those based on biases of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or gender” (FBI, n.d.).

Since YouTube’s parent company Alphabet is American, it is up to YouTube to define for themselves what content they will allow on their platform. YouTube say they might allow hate speech if the primary purpose is educational, documentary, scientific, or artistic in nature, and does not promote hatred against a specific group of people, saying that “YouTube does not allow use of slurs with the intent to attack, dehumanize or degrade members of protected groups” (YouTube Creators, 2019).

Because of this, “unwanted,” “problematic,” or “extremist” political content on YouTube has become nearly synonymous with right-wing content. Due to the previously discussed nature of politics on YouTube – with culture war politics being as prominent as they are and with the response-counter response nature of their videos – it is only natural that one side will have to be on the wrong side of YouTube’s guidelines, while the other is not. To use a recent example, YouTube has decided to delete all content that alleges fraud altered the outcome of the 2020 presidential election (Walsh, 2020).

But what does that mean for political YouTube going forward? It could mean that the overall quality of the political discussion on the site is going to improve in the coming years, or at the very least become more deliberative. By refusing to host content that does not follow YouTube’s guidelines, it forces content creators who wants to post their content to the site to avoid using any harmful rhetoric, not to upload any content that promotes hate, and not promote baseless conspiracy theories. This would be good news for those who preferred Austere channels and content. It would mean YouTube taking a shift towards becoming a platform for more traditional types of political content.

However, I do not believe banning it from YouTube will cause hate speech to go away. For some it will mean that it is less accessible, but there is reason to believe that some will seek it out, no matter where you banish it to. A study by Van Tilburg and Igou suggests boredom may be a key factor in explaining why people seek out more extreme content: “boredom motivates people to alter their situation and fosters the engagement in activities that seem more meaningful than those currently at hand” (Van Tilburg and Igou, 2016, p. 687). Boredom is characterized by an unpleasant feeling of having little on your mind, yet having a good understanding of what is going on, of feeling uninterested, unstimulated, unchallenged,

and devoid of purpose. Boredom will then push people towards changing their situation (Ibid, p. 687). Particularly *situational boredom*, boredom brought about by environmental sources, like activities that feel meaningless, push people in the direction of more extreme beliefs (ibid, p. 689).

When it came to my informants, many of them had sought out more extreme content, at least if we use YouTube's guidelines and Norwegian laws about free speech to dictate what constitutes as extreme content, in the past. This happened between five and three years ago, while all my informants were students. It is possible that an explanation for why they gravitated towards that content was because most of them were students in high school at the time, who might have had too much time and energy and nowhere to put it. Since politics on YouTube was universally referred to as "fun" among my informants, and many of them reported YouTube being either a place for entertainment or a platform they could use to kill time, it seems they might have turned to politics on YouTube in hopes of killing boredom. Van Tilburg and Igou also show how, when people seek meaning, it often affects their political orientations, in particular those regarding right-wing versus left-wing stances (Ibid. p. 689). In other words, it makes them more likely to identify strongly with one side over the other. YouTube's political system becomes the perfect place to go for the sort of content the informant might have sought at that stage: an uncompromising place with a rigid "us versus them" mentality. The reason why so many ended up on the political right I believe, as I wrote earlier, mainly comes down to the political right at the time simply being more "fun" than the left, and the political YouTubers coming across as better role models. When the left eventually caught up and improved their craft, my informants who had watched right-wing content found their way over to them by their own volition.

The left-wing content can of course still be considered quite extreme: several of the most prominent YouTubers on the left proudly label themselves as communists and promote ideas like anarchism and defunding the police (Spice8Rack, 2020). The difference is that the largest YouTubers on the political left, despite often having their videos demonetized for not being what YouTube refers to as "advertiser friendly," are not known for getting strikes on their channel for saying something that could be considered racist or incite hatred towards a group of people. The same cannot be said about many of the content creators on the right, who have had multiple strikes against their channels. Most recently, Steven Crowder, the largest overtly political channel on YouTube, had his content permanently demonetized by YouTube. In the video he got suspended over, which he has long since been deleted from his own channel, Crowder challenged the legitimacy of Nevada's vote count in the presidential election of 2020

(Hollister, 2021). This came mere weeks after he had uploaded another video, in which he and his co-hosts went on what can only be described as a racist rant about African American farmers, likening them to drug addicts (Peters, 2021). That video sparked a massive outcry in the political YouTube community, drawing responses from The Young Turks, Hasan Abi, as well as several African American YouTubers.

Because of this, there is an argument to be made for keeping *all* political content on YouTube, no matter its nature. On YouTube, extreme content gets exposed and ridiculed by a large network, which, in the case of my informants, was what helped them abandon it and see that what they had been watching was deeply problematic. By banning that content from the platform, I fear it would only escape to darker corners of the internet, while the political YouTubers who are left behind lose a source for content and, by extension, part of their income. Therefore, being hesitant with banning content might be the best way forwards. Otherwise, I fear we only scrub one site clean, while dirtying the internet as a whole.

It is also worth remembering a quote by ContraPoints (2018) from her video on incels: "Sometimes the best way to understand a person's world is to learn their language." If we remove their content from the site all together, we are making it a lot harder for people like ContraPoints who work to deradicalize young men to do their job.

I have found that previous research done on political YouTube has covered the right-wing extensively, while giving too little attention to the left. This means that the vast left-wing network has not been given the attention it deserves as a source for information and as a tool for constructing one's own identity. Many researchers probably see the right wing as the most important part of the political YouTube landscape to investigate, as it is the part closest connected to online radicalization. For me it also proved to be the most difficult part of political YouTube to investigate, because people who considered themselves to be right-wing simply did not wish to speak to me. A why reason might be because of the distrust towards establishment and elites that alternative right-wing media promote. Donald Trump's labelling of much of the media establishment as "fake news" is common practice among alternative right-wing media channels as well. Holt (2020, p. 21) says that the alternative right promotes an idea that the mainstream media deliberately silences those they do not agree with, which results in "the feeling that the democratic system does not work properly as there are built-in barriers to free exchange of views in the public conversation." What they promote is idea of the alternative right-wing media standing up to an oppressive power. In 2016, Sargon of Akkad/Carl Benjamin took it a step further when he tried to influence academia by starting a

petition on change.org, saying that “Social justice professors are indoctrinating young people into a pseudoscientific cult behind closed doors” (Benjamin, C., 2016).

It is no small wonder, then, that it was easier to find informants who followed left-wing channels. The YouTubers they follow will often criticize elites and society’s structure and the mainstream media, but, again, because of the way the Culture War issues and politics on YouTube works, if the right-wing is negative towards academia, then the left-wing is more likely to be supportive of it.

Among my informants it was rare for someone to watch both left-wing and right-wing content. Among those who did, one described himself as a centrist libertarian who liked to see what was going on in the two camps, one who said he watched right-wing content because he found it funny, and one who said he watched it because he was not yet sure where his own political allegiance lay. Defining yourself as right- or left-wing is one of the most fundamental parts of understanding your own political identity; to understand who we are as people, we must find groups or individuals we can identify with (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 25-26), and groups or individuals we can identify ourselves against (Ibid, p. 17). Those who were certain of where they stood ideologically preferred not to watch content from those they disagreed with. Interestingly, there is a paradox that appears here: Tilburg and Igou say that people who had their beliefs challenged often would only become increasingly devoted to their beliefs (2016, p. 688), which certainly fits with the way many of my informants were extremely reluctant to watch content that did not align with their own beliefs. However, those who had started watching right-wing content did so despite it often disagreeing with some of their values. What made them switch over to left-wing content was finding content that disagreed with the right-wing content they had been watching. It seems that, if you are not absolutely certain where on the political spectrum you belong, having your views challenged can have a positive effect and leave you more open to investigate other avenues.

Still, their political orientation was something my informants greatly incorporated into their own identity. Many reported that they could not see themselves being friends with people who were right-wing or made sure to point out how their friends who did watch right-wing content were different from them, often in a mocking manner.

Members of groups see themselves as different from anyone who is not a member of their group (Kenny, 2004. p. 3). In online political discourse, this sort of politics, which helps people define who they are, or understand what it means to be a part of a group of people, is referred to as identity politics. It is said to give “individuals (…) a connection to political projects based on elements that are very basic to their self-conceptions” (ibid, p. 3) I believe

part of the reason why identity politics was so popular among my informants, especially when they were just starting to explore their own political identity, is because it required less understanding of political systems and structures in order to understand the politics being discussed. You do not need to know anything about the history of civil rights movements to take a stand for or against feminism if you have YouTubers explaining it to you. In that way, young adults are having civic experiences (Kaun, 2014, p. 255) that help them define who they are, and what they stand for. Later in life can take these experiences and expand on them, to further.

5.3: Political YouTube is a place to develop new relationships

The most important factor in whether or not someone developed any kind of relationship towards the YouTubers they followed were, as we saw earlier, dependent on if they followed primarily Austere or Casual channels. The Austere channels make little to no attempt at creating a parasocial relationship with the viewer. They focus instead of coming across as serious and reliable sources of information. The Casual channels, on the other hand, appear to be well aware of the potential effects of parasocial relationships, and will often play quite obviously into them.

This seems to be an effective strategy as well, as several of those who watched primarily Casual channels said they followed them just because of the YouTubers. Horton and Wohl say of the personae that their audience will often think of them as a friend, adviser, or role model. The personae, in this case a political YouTuber, can choose for themselves what they want to be for the viewer (1997, p. 28). In most cases, Casual political YouTubers choose to come across as a mix of friend and adviser, or role-model. My informants did show very high levels of trust towards the political YouTubers they followed, especially when compared to how they felt about actual politicians. This is not uncommon: Horton and Wohl specifically mention high levels of trust as a side-effect of parasocial relationships (1997, p. 28), but it is worth considering what effects it might have on the YouTuber as a source for political information.

I believe there are both positive and negative sides to this. The most obvious negative sides are the potential for the viewers to form strong ties to political YouTubers whose content is, at best, dubious. One informant in particular mentioned Tim Pool as a YouTuber he still followed, even though he was not quite sure how he felt about some of the things Pool had to say about the election possibly being rigged. If people form parasocial relationship to characters like Tim Pool, there is a legitimate danger, originating in the high level of trust, of

them believing in conspiracy theories, which might lead to radicalization. YouTube and other social media platforms have taken steps to prevent misinformation from being spread on their sites, like the ban election fraud conspiracy videos.

There can, however, also be positive sides to people forming parasocial relationships with political YouTubers. I would particularly point to ContraPoints as someone who deliberately attempts to form parasocial relationships with her audience, but where the outcome is either deradicalization, or radicalization towards an ideology that preaches equality over segregation (Maddox and Creech, 2020, p. 11), and which does not have the same history of creating mass shooters or women-hating societies as the alternative right. ContraPoints functions as an introduction for young males to subjects they are unlikely to otherwise learn a lot about, as we saw when one informant pointed out how she had taught him most of what he knew about the experiences of trans people. Wynn herself says of her videos that she "treats her videos as a kind of resource that someone who is questioning their beliefs can turn to" (Ibid, p. 8).

Second, it enables young adults to see themselves represented in politics, which makes it easier to think of politics as something that is not just happening around them, but as something they can partake in. Both in terms of sexuality and gender, young women in particular found it refreshing to see themselves represented in political discussions. According to Van Zoonen, the traits we typically consider favorable in a politician are masculine (2005, p. 73). Fame and publicity have for a long time also been the domain of men, the field of politics even more so (Ibid, p. 88). For many women, the way into politics came via their husbands (Ibid, p. 92). However, on YouTube is the domain of microcelebrities (Senft, 2013). The rules regarding fame and who gets a say in politics are completely different. The women in my study reported that they liked being able to see people who were like themselves: young women concerned with social issues, possibly even a little edgier than the average politician. Even though we today have an enormous freedom of choice in regard to media, that does not mean everyone gets equally represented, particularly in mainstream media (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 23). Representation can be seen as a form of acknowledgement of a groups' existence and can generate a strong emotional response in the represented group (Ibid, p. 24.) Politics on YouTube can therefore be an efficient tool in providing the disenfranchised not just with a voice, but also with an entry point into a field they have previously been gatekept out of.

Had the YouTubers been the sole reason why people subscribed to them, I would have been more worried about their potential influence over their followers. But not one of my informants reported being subscribed to political YouTubers exclusively because of the person behind the channel. It did seem like a lot of those who were subscribed to right-wing

YouTubers in the past might have been subscribed not because they agreed with their political views, but rather because they felt it coincided better with their own desired identity. Since then, it seemed like many of my informants were experiencing stronger ties to communities than to individuals. This was particularly true for those who watched primarily Casual channels, as the channels they followed work closer together in a network. If you watch one of the three most popular channels mentioned by my informants, it was nearly impossible not to at least have heard of the other two, and often people would be familiar with much of what is called “BreadTube.”

Since my informants felt a belonging to the left, it is only natural, with the diametrically opposed nature of the two networks, that they should also feel a strong dislike towards the right. This is probably the biggest drawback of how politics on YouTube works; if your preferred political YouTubers are Casual channels, it is extremely difficult to get a nuanced view at a lot of issues, as the YouTubers themselves play heavily into the “us versus them” mentality. Perhaps, if YouTube keeps maturing as a political platform, it will one day be able to host more content that focuses on seeing both sides of a case, when that is possible and desirable.

Part 6: Conclusion

6.1: How and why do young adults use YouTube as a platform to engage with political content?

For my informants, YouTube has taken over many of the functions of television, from entertainment, to being a source for news and other types of information. My informants were drawn towards YouTube as a source for political content first and foremost because it offered them political content that they found to be highly entertaining, at the same time as it was informative. On YouTube, complex political ideas and convictions can be presented in simplified ways that are easy to understand and leaves the viewer feel more informed.

The political channels on YouTube come in two major categories: Austere and Casual channels. The Austere channels present themselves more akin to traditional media outlets, like TV or radio, while the Casual channels' style is more like regular YouTubers and relies more on the person running the channel.

Whether they preferred Austere or Casual channels mattered for how and my informants interacted with political content on YouTube. Those who preferred Austere channels were more interested in serious debate, were more likely to want to see issues from both sides, and would often say they that quality was the most important factor for deciding if they would follow a channel or not. Meanwhile, those who preferred Casual channels also wanted to see quality content, but were far less likely to watch content they disagreed with, and were more closely invested in the person running the channel.

One of the main reasons why politics on YouTube was more entertaining than traditional politics in the offline world, was because it was more concerned with a type of politics my informants felt was relevant for them. Politics on YouTube, especially on a lot of the channels watched by my informants, is cultural politics. It can be seen as a part of the wider "Culture War" phenomenon. Culture War issues are concerned with moral questions; about what is morally right or wrong in society. On YouTube, cultural political issues are often presented and discussed using pop culture references. This combination of learning and entertainment is called "edutainment," and makes it easier for the viewer to relate to and understand the issues being discussed.

The combination of politics and entertainment has led some to question the validity of the political content, but what I found was that my informants did not consider following political YouTube channels as a substitute for local political news. If political content on YouTube substituted something, it was other forms of entertainment. My informants would treat videos

from their favorite political YouTubers the same way others might treat movies or music, often watching it along with other people, or letting it run in the background while they were doing other things.

Political YouTube had a lot of different educational purposes for my informants. Some would use it to learn more about political ideologies or how the political system works, which they then might use to try to influence others, while others would use it to learn new skills, which they then found practical uses for outside of YouTube.

6.2: How does YouTube impact young adults' political identity?

Political YouTube helped my informants understand their own political affiliations and opinions better. Many of them enjoyed the variation in political philosophies they could find being discussed and represented on the site, which they often felt lacked in traditional offline politics. They also enjoyed that the political YouTubers spoke of topics that felt relevant to them.

Though all my informants now identified as left-wing, more than half had previously mostly watched right-wing channels. When they first became interested in politics on YouTube, they struggled to find content creators on the left they liked. Meanwhile, the content creators on the right came across as cool and reasonable. Despite often not agreeing with them politically, my informants ended up watching these right-wing channels, because they were the ones they wanted to identify themselves with. Only later, when new left-wing content creators appeared, or the older channels had improved their artform did my informants find content creators they both liked and agreed with who they could identify with.

There is good reason to suspect that young adults finding political role models on YouTube could lead to parasocial relationships. Among those who preferred Casual channels, some of my informants had clear tendencies of developing parasocial relationships with their favorite YouTubers, which I argue could have both positive and negative effects.

Political content on YouTube is mostly concerned with American politics, with a few channels also focusing on European politics. Still, my informants found most of it to be highly relevant for their own lives. I theorize that this is because of the globalizing effect of the internet, where national borders matter far less. When it comes to politics on YouTube, sex, gender, race, and nationality matter far less than your political affiliation. Political YouTube is an extremely polarized environment, with little room for deliberative political discussion. Instead, it is dominated by two major camps who are deeply at odds with one

another. For most of my informants, defining themselves as a part of one of the camps had become an important part of their identity.

I discuss the criticism many scholars and journalists have leveled against YouTube as a platform for political content. I argue that while there are good reasons to be concerned, Google has made improvements to the site over the years, which has drastically reduced the amount of extremist content the site allowed. Meanwhile, the political community has matured a lot since 2016. We should not consider it negatively when people combine leisure time with education. Instead, we might look to Schudson (2000) and ask if our rigid model for a "Good citizen" is in need of adjusting.

6.3: Further research.

In this thesis paper I have presented YouTube as a platform where young adults can watch and engage with political content, to show how it impacts their perception of politics as a field and their own personal political identity.

One of my main claims regarding YouTube as a platform for politics is that if we want to truly understand how it works, it is vital that we look on both sides of the political spectrum, and that we give a voice to those who actually use it for political content. It is not enough to merely look at the content that gets uploaded, nor to base our work on the idea that the political content does something to the watcher, and not also the other way around. I have therefore tried to show how the two political spheres, the right and left wings, work in a mutually beneficial relationship based on responding to each other's material.

Unfortunately, for my thesis paper I have only been able to interview a small sample of young adults who use YouTube for political content, who were also a very homogenous group in terms of political affiliation. I would propose that another, similar study should be carried out, but instead of interviewing young adults who watch primarily left-wing YouTubers, the focus should be on those who watch right-wing YouTubers instead. This would help provide a better understanding of potentially different motivations for using the content, as well as possibly uncover a difference in usage patterns.

The long-term effects of using YouTube as a platform for political content should also be studied further. From my interviews it seemed clear that if you spent enough time on political YouTube, you would eventually find channels that lined up with your own set of political beliefs and affiliations. I cannot conclude whether this has any effect in regard to further political action, though there were indications it might. Can watching political content on YouTube over a longer period influence who people vote for in elections, or can it cause them

to take different civic actions, like joining political parties or organizations?

More research should be given to the potential echo-chamber effects of the left-wing on YouTube, in a similar manner to what Lewis did with the right-wing "Alternative Influence Network" in 2019. It would be extremely beneficial for future research to have a point of reference when it comes to researching the left-wing, as one now has when researching the right-wing.

Finally, as new social media become popular, especially ones focused on content creators and influencers, it could be important to explore what political content on the site looks like, and what uses it may have for its audience. TikTok has rapidly grown to become one of the largest social medias in the world, and already has a blooming network of political content creators (He, 2020). Future research into how young people interact with political content on the app could provide interesting insights into what political issues they are interested in, and what shapes their political identities.

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