

**Towards a Theory of Media Power in a Networked Communication  
Environment: Case Studies of #Demo2012, Adidas, and #AskSnowden**

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PhD Submission

## **Declaration of Authorship**

I ..... hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to the debate about media power by advancing a new theoretical perspective. I critique existing theories of media power and argue that media power as it operates in today's complex media environment can be understood as being based on interactions between the culturally and communicatively symbolic components of media communication and the material features and processes of media through which such symbolic communication occurs. I develop and apply an analytical model capable of spanning these two domains and their complex qualities. To develop the model I adopt a neo-materialist ontology based on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizomatic assemblages, Hertog and McLeod's multi-perspectival frame analysis and DeLanda's theory of the assemblage. I argue that this approach can capture both the symbolic and the material dimensions of media that function through networked, complex and emergent interactions. My analytical model is based on four pillars: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding. I used the model to guide my empirical fieldwork investigation of three case studies: a public demonstration, an animal rights protest aimed at undermining a well-known brand and the high-profile leaks by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013. Ethnography, content analysis and interview data were used to assess my model's suitability for making sense of these three cases. Finally, in the conclusion I propose four future themes that this thesis reveals are significant for research on media power: the importance of institutional adaptation, the role of emotion and affect, the significance of computation and the materiality of technology.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

the question of power, as traditionally formulated, does not make sense in the network society [...] new forms of domination and determination are critical in shaping people's lives [...] albeit in new forms and with new actors.

(Castells, 2009: 45)

The media and communication landscape has undergone a series of tectonic shifts in the past decade (González-Bailón, 2015). Established media institutions have faced several years of decline; and more recently – in some areas at least –renewal and growth (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012). In parallel with the changes occurring to the industrial media, the adoption and use of personal and social media has enabled a rapid growth in “mass *self-communication*” [my emphasis] (Castells, 2009) which has augmented, undermined and reinforced institutional media interests in a range of ways unforeseen even five years ago (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016). As a consequence of this shift in the balance of media power, technology companies, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, their attendant software and digital infrastructure have come to play a more central role in the communication of everyday life through the control and management of data and information flows (Bell, 2014; 2016).

Such developments, symptomatic of the contemporary “Network Society” (Castells, 2000) or “Networked Information Economy” (Benkler, 2006) have reinvigorated a range of issues pertinent to studies of media and communication and, perhaps more significantly, opened up new and previously largely unforeseen areas of scholarship drawn from other fields. For instance, the ability to establish and circulate representations of societal issues has been transferred in broad terms from the preserve of the media industries to constellations of digitally-networked individuals such as citizen journalists (Breindl, 2016) or digital activists (Allen, 2016).

The rise in influence of digital media platforms and communication channels has meant that the algorithms and other computational processes running in the background of such platforms are increasingly playing a role in influencing and determining information flows. Moreover, the dominant commercial orientation of such technology is refocusing critical attention on the political economy of media



communication, rather than the more reception-based and culturally-determinist perspectives on media power prevalent in recent literature.

The materiality of technology infrastructure presents itself too in the growth of mobile and wearable technologies that increasingly brings locative and other physical infrastructure of the built and ‘real world’ environment into media production processes. This evolution in the significance of the materiality of media and communication fits neatly into a much broader conceptual development: neo-materialism. Originating in sociology and philosophy neo-materialism focuses on the centrality and validity of matter and the material components – understood as “a commitment to the mind-independent existence of reality” (DeLanda, 2006: 1) - of the social realm.

This approach argues for a broader interpretation of society’s material structures and forces than that offered by a Durkheimian positivism or a classical Marxist economic determinism. Rather it has sought to account for the everyday materiality of society found in previously inert or inanimate objects, such as the built environment, technological devices, computer code and physical space (Coole & Frost, 2010). Importantly, such material objects gain agency and operate in conjunction with the hitherto dominant analyses of language and symbolic representation in mediating power.

It is at the intersection of these current trends and trajectories that this thesis situates itself. Specifically, the thesis is interested in the ways that theories of media power are being reshaped by both the developments in technology as well as the renewed theoretical focus on the materiality of media seen over the past decade. Having introduced the broad concerns that this thesis seeks to address, the following section will define what media power is and how it operates. Finally, the section will outline the three research questions that will be investigated by the thesis in order to provide both a theoretical *as well as* empirical contribution to the field.

### **Defining Media Power**

Defining in clear terms the operational terms and concepts adopted in the thesis is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is essential to clarify the object of analysis, that is: media power, and ensure that the theoretical context and model subsequently

adopted in the empirical analysis is consistently applied. Secondly, defining exactly what is meant by media power is also a crucial analytical task in itself due to the continued conceptual debates occurring around the term. As Freedman (2014) has recently noted: “despite its increased use in political, academic, and professional circles it is far from clear precisely what we mean by media power” (Freedman, 2014: 2).

Couldry and Curran (2003) have refined this challenge by asserting that media power has two ‘faces’. They suggest that the definition of media power depends on the direction from which it is approached. From one direction, they argue, the media is a location where “*other* powerful forces” in society “wage *their* battles (big business against labor, old professional and class elites against new cultural ones, and so on)” (Couldry and Curran, 2003: 3) (emphasis in original).

From such a perspective the media is merely a conduit for other actors to exert power in society; the media is a site that has no power within itself (Castells, 2007: 242) and is “merely the door through which the contestants for power pass *en route* to battle” (Couldry and Curran, 2003: 3). Viewed from the other direction, however, Couldry and Curran argue that media power is the media’s ability to exert a symbolic power (Couldry and Curran, 2003, 4) or definitional power which defines the shared reality of everyday life (Couldry, 2001: 5).

From this perspective, media power is understood as a “definitional, analytical, and interpretive authority” (Freedman, 2015: 273) that functions by processing and creating meaning within society (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 27) and, ultimately, “by framing what we take in, providing context and understanding and creating understandings that shape attitudes and action” (Russell, 2016: 143).

### **Media Power: How does it operate?**

Taking the definition outlined above as the ‘what’ of media power, the next step in setting out the context in which this thesis will undertake its analysis is to understand and account for the ‘how’ of media power – that is, how it is constituted, how it functions and how does it achieve its outcomes.

Undertaking this task is not as straight-forward as it may seem, however, as despite the media's central role in exerting a power to shape and define contemporary society's shared, everyday experiences, it is a phenomenon that is not commonly recognised, let alone understood (Couldry, 2001; Couldry and Curran, 2003). Similarly, Hackett and Carroll (2006) argue that even after many years of research, key questions relating to media power, for example "[d]o media reinforce hierarchies and social inequalities, or challenge them? Do media solidify the status quo or catalyse progressive social change?" remain "open questions" (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 27).

In response to this context, Couldry and Curran argue that in order to understand the 'how' of media power it is important for researchers to examine what goes on within media's "blackbox" – that is, understand "how decisions are made, who influences them and who doesn't" and to "analyse the consequences of those decisions (and exclusions)" (Couldry and Curran, 2003: 5). For Freedman (2014), in order to undertake such analyses of decision-making (and thus meaning-making) processes operating within media power we need to understand

the relationships—between actors, institutional structures, and contexts—that organise the allocation of the symbolic resources necessary to structure our knowledge about, and by extension our capacity to intervene in, the world around us (Freedman, 2014: 274)

Crucially, as alluded to in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the constitutive properties of - and relationships between - this constellation of actors, structures and contexts has been changing significantly over the past decade. Whereas, once such constellations influencing media power would have been comprised of 'elites' – that is: corporate actors and forces or state actors and forces (Davies, 2007) the growth of new media technologies – in particular the emergence and widespread adoption of the internet and networked media – has brought about quantitative and qualitative changes.

In quantitative terms, for example, it can be argued that through the mass adoption use of social networking platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, self-

publishing platforms, such as blogs<sup>1</sup> and online forums, and more recently private messaging services such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (Kemp, 2018) it can be argued that the public have been allocated a greater role and increased agency in terms of media production, distribution and consumption.

Thus, media's ability to shape and define meaning; attitudes and actions in society has arguably become more widely diffused across the social realm – shifting from a smaller number of elite-oriented 'formal' media sites, such as state-backed or corporate publishers and broadcasters out into the public domain populated by 'informal' media sites and actors. Moreover, the media technologies underpinning and enabling such a shift, for example digital social networks and self-publishing platforms - and the organisations behind them - have become increasingly embedded in the relational constellation of media actors and thus must be taken into account when attempting to delineate and define a view of how contemporary media power operates.

From a qualitative perspective, this rise of digital media and its attendant technologies has meant that media can be understood “not merely as transmitters - the old “mass media” function - but rather as data collectors, storage houses, and processing centers” for information and data (Packer, 2013: 297). Such a perspective, drawing on the renewed interest in the German media scholarship of Friedrich Kittler, focuses attention on the material qualities of media and the ways in which they shape media's interaction with the actors, structures and contexts in which it exists to “reconfigure power/knowledge relationships via the production of truth” (*ibid.*).

Adopting terminology from software development, Russell (2016) argues that media power in a digitally-networked era has both a “front-end” and “back-end”<sup>2</sup> (Russell, 2016: 149). Such a turn of phrase neatly encapsulates the primary concerns of media power in a digitally- driven world. Russell asserts that in a world where communication is digital, media power must be studied in ways that take into

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'blog' derives from a contraction of 'Weblog' – the name originally given to a self-publishing platform where users would publish often personal opinions and news. More detailed background and historical context of media platforms and institutions are provided in subsequent chapters.

<sup>2</sup> These terms emerge from software development. Although they are not explicitly defined and can have different connotations depending on the context in which they are applied, they can be understood as follows: Front-end refers to the publicly-visible elements of software, such as the user or graphical interface whereas the Back-end is the hardware or infrastructure which, often, shapes or controls the Front-end. Russell uses the terms here to imply the media power functions through symbolic, visible as well as more material, structuring elements.

account the ‘front-end’ of media, that is the representational content produced, published and communicated - both by formal media actors and institutions and the informal, digitally-empowered public – and the back-end, that is the hitherto hidden or invisible infrastructural domain of media, including the technologies, algorithms, laws and protocols that contain and shape representational content (*ibid.*).

Recognising contemporary media power, then, as the interaction between both the culturally and communicatively symbolic components of media communication *as well as* the material features and processes through which such meaning is made, requires researchers to develop and apply an analytical model capable of spanning these two domains and their complex qualities.

Before unpacking and defining the notion of contemporary media power adopted in this thesis and the analytical model operationalised in its investigation, it is useful to add some clarifying commentary regarding the distinction between both the representational and material aspects of media power, the implications this may present and the way in which the thesis will address such issues.

While both the symbolic and material functions of media exert power by influencing the production and definition of the world around us, arguably the nature of such definitional qualities differ inasmuch as the purely representational dimensions of media power are ideological, whereas the material dimensions of media power are epistemological (Packer, 2013: 295). That is, while media power’s ‘front-end’ is concerned with how information is selected and (re)presented from existing sources of knowledge based on competing opinions and agendas, its ‘back-end’ is largely concerned with the media’s ability to determine and shape what information becomes available as a source of knowledge. In other words, media “determine the brute facticity of what data are selected, stored, and processed ... they make possible new forms of knowledge” (*ibid.*: 296).

While definitionally distinct, these two aspects of media power are arguably inter-related. Media power is not a binary function; its ability to shape and set truth and reality requires it to operate at both a representational (ideological) as well as material (epistemological) level. Returning to Russell’s dual typology, media power, in Russell’s terms, has *both* a front-end and back-end.

From an empirical perspective, it is important to be alert to each of these levels or layers operating within media power to enable, first and foremost, its effective analysis in contemporary society. But it is also important to ensure a clarity of approach that can rise above any excessive theory-building present in the scholarly environment. As Bollmer has noted: “the encounter between cultural studies’ past and today’s theories of media materiality needs a bit more nuance, or else these two forms of media studies do little more than name fabricated exteriors each uses to define their difference from the other” (Bollmer, 2015: 97).

It is the aim of this thesis to address such concerns by taking into account the fact that cultural and symbolic approaches to media emerge from earlier (cultural) materialist contexts while, similarly, materialist approaches have emerged from culturally hermeneutic contexts. Recognising this theoretical inter-relationship should enable the analysis of contemporary media power undertaken in this thesis to be made with a more nuanced, more rounded – indeed, hybrid - view of the material *as well as* cultural/symbolic dynamics and components in operation. In turn, this should allow for the development and adoption of a robust conceptual and methodological basis and enable an empirical analysis of the actors, processes, decisions and actions present in contemporary media power.

### **Research Questions**

Adopting the definition of media power outlined above and seeking to explore further its evolving features and characteristics, this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by advancing both a new theoretical perspective *and* empirical exploration of the field of contemporary media power. It does this by addressing three research questions:

**RQ1.** Firstly, the thesis will answer the question: *what could a revised theory of media power look like given the transformations that have occurred within the media landscape over recent years?* This will be achieved by undertaking a review of relevant literature examining conceptual developments in political, sociological and philosophical perspectives on power. Based on this review any gaps, convergences and divergences between them are identified and assessed in order to ascertain how media power concords with the complete notion of power in society more generally. By doing so, the thesis will establish a sense of the

potential 'shape' - that is the boundaries, constituent parts and operational forces - which a contemporary theory of media power might encompass.

**RQ2.** Secondly, the thesis will address the question: *can an analytical model be developed that will allow researchers to effectively identify and analyse contemporary media power?* This question will be answered by establishing a model that will enable the thesis to empirically test the *who, what, how* and *why* of contemporary media power as outlined in the theoretical perspective developed in RQ1 above.

**RQ3.** Thirdly, the thesis will take the analytical model developed in response to RQ2 and assess whether it offers researchers value. *Can the analytical model of contemporary media power developed in RQ2 be validated through empirical analysis?* The question will be answered by taking the analytical model, developing an appropriate set of methods for empirical analysis and testing it across a series of three case studies.

In answering these questions, the thesis will proceed according to the following structure: *Chapter 2* will set the scene for an investigation of contemporary media power by undertaking a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding the chronological evolution and inter-relation of social, political and media power. In doing so, the chapter locates the origins of media power scholarship within the wider political and social traditions from which it has emerged, and by which it has been directly influenced. From this survey and discussion, the chapter concludes by answering RQ1 and presenting a revised theory of media power.

*Chapter 3* addresses the central challenge set in RQ2 by developing an analytical model to empirically investigate the revised theory of media power developed in the previous chapter. In doing so, the chapter firstly sets out the underlying ontological position on which the analytical model will be developed in order to adequately account for the neo-materialist nature of contemporary media power (Coole and Frost, 2010).

This is achieved through the adoption of Assemblage Theory (DeLanda, 2006), which is then integrated with media framing theory (Reese, 2001) in order to translate the thesis' ontological status into a media and communications-oriented

perspective. Next, the core variables – the *who*, *what*, *how* and *why* of the analytical model - are identified and defined. Finally, four over-arching analytical pillars: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding, are developed in order to operationalise the model in the subsequent empirical analysis.

Building on this analytical model, *Chapter 4*, sets out the research approach adopted in the thesis, the data collection and analysis methods used in the subsequent chapters containing empirical work. The chapter sets out in practical terms how the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3* is used to explore, build on and validate the revised theory of media power established in *Chapter 2*. Crucially, the chapter will review and discuss core methodological concerns, including the ethical approach adopted in the analysis, limitations of the chosen methods, sampling and selection considerations and reflexivity.

*Chapters 5, 6 and 7* will present the empirical analyses conducted in the thesis across three case studies: Demo2012, animal rights activists versus Adidas and #AskSnowden respectively. These case studies are analysed using the core pillars of the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3* with analysis proceeding chronologically to enable full investigation of the media assemblages' evolution emerging through each event. In each case study media power is assessed by the development of a heavily territorialised, coded assemblage which establishes a media frame interpreting and defining the event or issue.

Finally, *Chapter 8* highlights the original contribution to knowledge made by the thesis by revisiting the original research questions and summarising and discussing the theoretical and empirical evidence analysed in the thesis. It concludes by providing pointers toward future work.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Power and Media: A Review of the Existing Literature**

Over the past half-century the horizons of scholarship in political, sociological and philosophical perspectives on power have become transformed by a number of conceptual shifts. In this relatively short period of time theoretical accounts of power have shifted from viewing it as an unproblematic, visible force with clear causal effects playing a normative role within democratic institutions (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957); to a covert force located within (often elite) economic, social and cultural structures (Lukes, 1974, Bourdieu, 1984; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Giddens, 1984; Gramsci, 1971) and, most recently, becoming dissolved and diffused into an ever-present, circulatory, series of symbolic-material networks instantiated across the social field (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1977b; Foucault, 1984; Latour, 2005a; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

By undertaking a review of relevant literature, this chapter will identify and assess the gaps, convergences and divergences between contemporary accounts of key conceptual developments in political, sociological and philosophical power and assess them against approaches to media power in order to ascertain to what extent and in which ways contemporary media power can be seen to align and operate in accordance with the complete notion of power in society more generally. By doing so, the chapter will conclude by providing a sense of the boundaries, constituent parts and operational forces of the two domains and therefore provide an outline shape of what a theory of media power might look like given the transformations that have occurred within the media landscape over recent years.

### **Origins of Contemporary Power: The Conflictual Tradition**

The origins of contemporary accounts of power can be located in the community power debates that occurred between American social and political scientists in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These debates broadly contested the level of “democraticness” of US society (Haugaard, 1997: 10), placing at the heart of the debate the issue of whether power was accreted and dispensed by a central elite (Hunter 1953; Schulze 1958; Mills 1956) or widely diffused among a plurality of key decision-makers (Bachrach & Baratz 1962).

Critiquing this elitist model, Dahl (1958) argued that by studying presumed pre-existent power structures in local communities, community power theorists merely demonstrate that certain groups within American society have a “high potential” for

power, rather than actual power. That is, while groups may exist that have potential for exerting power over a community, in reality these groups display a heterogeneity that diffuses and thus reduces capacity for power:

The actual *political effectiveness* of a group is a function of its potential for control [i.e. power] *and* its potential for unity. Thus a group with relatively low potential for control but high potential for unity may be more politically effective than a group with a high potential for control but a low potential for unity. [emphasis in original] (Dahl, 1958: 465)

In Dahl's view community power theory had evolved an unsatisfactory and "unsophisticated" conceptualisation of power based on presumption, rather than quantifiable values. In response to this elitist perspective, Dahl (1957) adopted the Weberian definition of power as occurring when "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Weber, 1978: 53). This enabled Dahl to develop a theory of power articulated as a conflict between two parties (Dahl, 1957: 202-203).<sup>3</sup>

Dahl's theory, based on causal and observable outcomes, arguably resolves the inadequacies of the elite conceptualisations of power through its ability to be empirically verified as a "*careful examination of a series of concrete decisions*" [emphasis in original] (Dahl, 1958: 466). For Dahl, this conflictual theory of power represented a normative approach due to the centrality of conflict and decision-making within democracy and democratic processes. In *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* Dahl's applied his theory to an analysis of the US city, New Haven (Dahl, 1961) which revealed that no single elite exerted control or power, thus providing both an operationalisation of his model and, crucially, vindicating his earlier democratic pluralist perspective.

Despite its initial significance, however, Dahl's attempts to develop a theory of conflictual power provoked further methodological critique by Bachrach and Baratz (1962). While broadly supportive of Dahl's conceptualisation of power, Bachrach and Baratz drew attention to an operational component of power they argue is found

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<sup>3</sup> In later articulations of this formulation Dahl (1968) substitutes the letters 'C' and 'R' for 'A' and 'B', although the meaning remains the same

within decision-making processes but is missing from both Dahl's conflictual model and earlier community power theorists. They ask:

Can a sound concept of power be predicated on the assumption that power is totally embodied and fully reflected in "concrete decisions" or in activity bearing directly on their making? (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962: 948)

Bachrach and Baratz believe that this cannot be the case owing to the mobilisation of bias within organisations or institutions that effectively shapes the ability of individuals to make some decisions, while restricting them from making others. They described this as "nondecision-making power" (*ibid.*: 952) and defined it as:

the manner in which the *status quo* oriented persons and groups influence those community values and those political institutions ... which tend to limit the scope of actual decision-making to "safe" issues (*ibid.*).

Conceptualised as the "two faces of power" (*ibid.*: 947) these seen and unseen applications of power provide a crucial reappraisal of Dahl's model that incorporate organisational bias into the conflictual tradition. Such bias is characterised by Bachrach and Baratz as the "dominant values, the myths and the established political procedures and rules of the game" (*ibid.*) that can be mobilised in shaping democratic decisions.

Methodologically Bachrach and Baratz's revision of the conflictual model of power retains Dahl's emphasis on empirical verifiability. If decision-making power can be observed and quantified, then nondecision-making power too can be examined through close analysis of which actors in any power conflict ultimately gain and which lose from existing bias (*ibid.*: 952; Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970).

Responding to these pluralist theories of power, Lukes (1974) offers a radical reappraisal of decision-making and nondecision-making power by describing them as the first and second "dimensions of power" respectively (Lukes, 1974: 15). To these dimensions, Lukes introduces a third which critiques pluralist approaches on account of such theories' strict adherence to an interpretation of power where "interests are consciously articulated and observable" (*ibid.*: 24-25). Even Bachrach

and Baratz's attempts to understand nondecision-making power as control of the political agenda nevertheless interprets nondecisions as intentional acts "consciously articulated and observable" (*ibid.*) within the conventional decision-making process. Without this normative framework nondecisions become merely unobservable and thus unquantifiable events.

Such an ambiguity leads Lukes to further critique Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz's pluralist theories of power as adopting a "too methodologically individualist view of power" (*ibid.*: 26) that privileges causal, observable conflict between two individuals. This account, according to Lukes, is a deficient account of power because power can also be exercised in ways that are unseen but remain central to the exercise of power. Lukes asserts: "is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?" (*ibid.*: 27).

Interpreting power this way enables Lukes to introduce the Marxist notion of false-consciousness, that is: a "function of collective forces and social arrangements" which conceals individuals' "true interests" (*ibid.*: 26). From this perspective Lukes elaborates his 'third dimension' of power that incorporates social forces and institutional practices into questions of individual agency. The resulting conceptualisation shifts analyses of power from actual, observable conflict to what Lukes terms "latent conflict": the "contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude" [emphasis in original] (*ibid.*: 28).

Using these insights Lukes reworks Dahl's Weberian formula to recognise the central role of interests. In Lukes' revised formula power occurs when "*A* exercises power over *B* when *A* affects *B* in a manner contrary to *B*'s interests" (*ibid.*: 37). At the core of Lukes' third dimension of power, then, is a conflation of power and knowledge in as much as "people's wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests" (*ibid.*: 38).

Such a distinction marks a significant conceptual break with pluralist notions of power and represents a step-change in the epistemological development of power by marking a conceptual terminus for the conflictual tradition (Clegg, 1989; Gohler, 2009). Lukes' introduction of false consciousness into power debates requires not

just a normative evaluation of “[f]airness in decision-making” or “neutrality in structural practices” but moreover demands “a cultural environment which allows people to make decisions which reflect their interest rather than the interest of others” (Haugaard, 1997: 18).

The third dimension of power, however, is not without limitations and Lukes himself revisits some of its core problems (Lukes, 2005). Lukes argues that his critique of the pluralists remains overly narrow in focus owing to its interpretation of power as a conflictual ‘power over’. This perspective risks painting a “reductive and simplistic picture of binary power relations” while ignoring the transformative or productive potential of power later identified by theorists of power (Lukes, 2005: 109).

In seeking a conceptual escape route from this position Lukes draws on Antonio Gramsci’s Marxist studies of power (Gramsci, 1971) which invoke a more subtle and complex investigation of the tension between the determinacy of social structures and their interaction with individual agency. Gramsci’s approach arguably provides a conceptual bridge between the Hobbesian, conflictual tradition of power with a theory of power emerging from re-readings of Niccoló Machiavelli’s political thought (Machiavelli, 2003). Machiavelli sought to understand how power could be used to influence and manage individual agency within society and thus opened up renewed debate about how power might be exercised through the strategic creation of consensus. This revitalised engagement and synthesis of the conflictual and consensual traditions of power opening up new horizons for the development of theories of power.

### **Consensual Approaches: Power, Duality and Discursivity**

Antonio Gramsci conceptualised power as operating according to a “dual perspective” of “force and consent” or “violence and civilisation” (Gramsci, 1971: 169), which he terms hegemony.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, hegemony rejects the centrality of force or violence in achieving power, instead seeking to understand and explain how domination operates in such a way as to generate consent.

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<sup>4</sup> Although the term hegemony pre-exists Gramsci’s use, his interpretation of hegemony can be best described as a synthesis of the original ancient Greek concept of leadership within military (or political) alliances and the use of the term by the Russian Social Democratic Party in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to denote tactical alliances between the minority working and peasant classes. For further analysis, see Fontana (2006)..

Central to this consensual power is Gramsci's concept of the "integrative state" where the traditional distinction between State (as a political entity) and Civil Society collapses and "a proper relation" between the two entities is established (Gramsci, 1971: 238).<sup>5</sup> This relation creates a situation where the State is no longer a separate space within society where power is located and thus the primary site of domination (through coercion or violence). Instead, the state is now an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of civil society making it "limited and circumscribed and responsive and subordinate" (Fontana, 2006: 33). Gramsci argues this is a strategic move differentiated from strategies of power adopted by previous ruling classes. Earlier strategies, Gramsci asserts, were:

essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from others into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere "technically" and ideologically. Their conception was that of a closed caste. The [hegemonic] bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level (Gramsci, 1971: 260).

This transformation enables dominant classes to co-opt the social and cultural world-view of subordinate social groups resulting in a shared world-view and values.

Thus, as Fontana (2006) notes: Gramsci's concept of hegemony "can be understood as the generation and organisation of consent" and as a result "is directly related to the mechanisms and processes by which knowledge and beliefs are first produced and second disseminated" (Fontana, 2006: 43). Significantly, while Gramsci's connection between power and knowledge offers a direct antecedent to Lukes' third dimension of power, Gramsci's hegemonic power represents a crucial break with the problematic notion of false consciousness present in Lukes' work (2005: 109).

Drawing inspiration from Machiavelli, Gramsci asserts that instead of a normative logic of true and false, hegemonic power is exercised through a relativist appraisal and selection of competing ideologies present within civil society. This enables dominant classes to undertake the strategic "formation and development" of

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<sup>5</sup> Crucially, Gramsci makes the distinction between State/Civil Society in politically and economically developed Western nations, e.g. Italy, and less developed nations. In particular, Gramsci's question: why did the revolution succeed in (less developed) Russia and not other (developed) Western nations provides the backdrop for his thinking around - and exposition of - hegemony.

‘subjective conditions’” (Fontana, 2006: 42) among subordinate classes. Hegemony, in essence, is the ability to exert power at an overt, normative democratic or institutional level through the strategic and covert exertion of power at a subjective level. By doing so, hegemony opens up a new interpretive horizon for power as a *domination through consensus*.

Despite this conceptual shift, however, Gramsci’s model is arguably limited by the Marxist worldview underlying his analysis that prioritises economic and class-based variables. Putting to one side this “utopian” political agenda (Haugaard, 2006: 50), however, we can recognise hegemony’s significance in moving conceptualisations of power further forward by seeking to “theorise ... how power has a consensual aspect that facilitates relations of domination” (*ibid.*). Taking key elements of hegemony beyond its Marxist framework enables us to seek to answers to broader questions concerning domination through consensus at a more integrated sociological level.

One of the most comprehensive attempts to answer such questions is found in Giddens’ *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens, 1984). Giddens; work attempts to overcome the traditional dualism of subjectivist and objectivist schools of thought (1984; 1981; 1979) by establishing a theory of social order in which subjective individual agency interacts with objective social structures to reflexively create reality as a series of social practices.

This Theory of Structuration adds a crucial variable to conceptualisations of power by introducing the notion of social practices as recursive human activity instead of permanent and overly determining social structures. For Giddens these practices create the conditions in which individual agency, and thus power, can be exercised (Giddens, 1984: 2; 14). Within such a conceptualisation, power remains a primarily conflictual phenomenon operating at the level of the individual as “the capacity to achieve outcomes” (*ibid.*: 257) and occurs when “something has happened that wouldn't otherwise, based on the agency of an actor” (Giddens, 1979: 91).

The dominance of agent-centred causality, however, is tempered by the assertion that power is “instantiated in action” (*ibid.*: 91) as individuals reproduce the social structures within which they exist. Thus, power as structural reproduction through individual agency is both enabling and constraining. Enabling social structures create



power resources for actors; however, these resources are then exercised at an individual level as domination and constraint over others (Haugaard, 1997: 107).

By locating domination and consensus within the everyday (re)production of social structures by individual actors this duality of power becomes internalised and perpetuated through a tacit form of social knowledge which Giddens terms “practical consciousness knowledge” (1984: 41-42). Practical consciousness knowledge differs significantly from Marxist approaches to power where ideology is invoked – either as false-consciousness (Lukes, 1974) or hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) – to achieve and perpetuate domination by concealing ‘true consciousness’ or alternative interpretations of society. Giddens rejects wholesale the idea that power is “inherently oppressive” (1984: 257) and rather asserts that “sectional interests” are not “germane to [power’s] definition” (*ibid.*: 15).

Instead, power relations within structuration exist asymmetrically placing “mutual autonomy and dependence” at the centre of power’s conceptualisation (Giddens, 1979: 93). As a result, individuals are conceived as “semi-autonomous agent[s]” that always possess some power within social structures and choose to act as they do “through a critical evaluation of the costs associated with alternative courses of action” (Haugaard, 1997: 109-110). What emerges, then, from Giddens’ Theory of Structuration is arguably a robust sociological conceptualisation of power that overcomes earlier tensions between agency and structure and shifts power away from Marxist concerns of political economic co-option.

Laydar (1985), Barbalat (1987) and Clegg (1989), however, critique Giddens’ work for replacing structural constraints with an overly subjectivist ontology. They argue variously that Giddens’ work on structuration focuses too much on individual agency and thus downplays more objective interpretations of durable and determining social structures which are replaced with “a reality of structure [as] a practical accomplishment of the reproduced conduct of situated actions with definite intentions and interests” (Giddens, 1976: 127). This represents an incongruity in Giddens approach to power as despite asserting that “sectional interests” are not relevant to definitions of power, Giddens un-problematically aligns structuration with “definite intentions and interests” thus returning us to Lukes and Gramsci’s earlier political conceptualisations of power.

The issue of “sectional interests” left problematically unresolved by Giddens is

addressed in greater depth by Bourdieu (1984; 1989). Bourdieu develops a model of power, like Giddens, premised on the duality of structure and agency but that accounts for the strategic manipulation of its constituting elements. Like Giddens (1984), Bourdieu (1977) asserts that objectivist and subjectivist perspectives of society exist in a dialectical relationship:

On the one hand, the objective structures that the sociologist constructs, in the objectivist moment, by setting aside the subjective representations of the agents, form the basis for these representations and constitute the structural constraints that bear upon interactions; but, on the other hand, these representations must also be taken into consideration particularly if one wants to account for the daily struggles, individual and collective, which purport to transform or to preserve these structures (1989: 15).

Bourdieu terms the two elements within this dialectic ‘Habitus’ (the structures forming the basis and constraint for actors) and ‘Field’ (representations of social activity transforming or preserving structures).

Habitus and Field can only function relationally and in doing so both enable and constrain actors. A Field is composed of actors participating in subjective social activity based on their knowledge of the world around them. This knowledge is consequently shaped by their Habitus that is, in turn, constituted by objective structures. Thus, Habitus enables actors to make sense of the world around them, while at the same time limiting the scope of action based on existing social structures.

Bourdieu makes an important conceptual break with Giddens, however, by asserting that the creation of constraint occurs through the relational positioning of individual or collective actors through specific strategies applied by actors that “occupy a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space” (1989: 16). These strategies are necessary to maintain hierarchical positions within society and function by generating what Bourdieu terms ‘symbolic capital’ – that is “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate”<sup>6</sup> (*ibid.*: 17).

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<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu continues Giddens’ general conceptual break with a classical Marxist economic determinism by devising a wider interpretive framework for ‘capital’ based on empirical research. As well adopting economic capital as one resource of what Bourdieu terms the “fundamental powers” he also introduces cultural capital and social capital, which operate as non-economic forces in construing symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989).

Operationalising this model of power through an analysis of elite culture, Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates how “strategies of condescension” are used to reify “good taste” by establishing the habits and dispositions of certain elite social groups as natural to those who exist within the culture and thus differentiating them from other arbitrary cultures or ways of life. Once this elite – albeit arbitrary - culture has become naturalised it becomes a scarce commodity conferring superiority on those within the particular habitus and as a result “legitimises existing relations of domination” within a framework of consensual conventionality (Haugaard, 2002: 227-228).

The centrality of strategic agency in shaping structural social relations in Bourdieu’s theory is crucial in returning analyses of power to concerns of accounting for social change. In Bourdieu’s interpretation, power is applied strategically by social groups to ensure arbitrary cultures and practices are established as the natural order or truth and which, in turn, prevents “a potential for knowledge which is undistorted by power” (Haugaard, 2002: 229) from existing. This challenges Giddens Theory of Structuration which fails to address adequately the question of how social practices and structures evolve. The source of this limitation is arguably Giddens’ over-reliance on the ontological security of practical consciousness knowledge (Giddens, 1984: 50) which closes down the possibility for conflict and challenge and thus perpetuates an individual’s structural reproduction of society (Haugaard, 1997: 113-114).

As a result, structuration fails to account for conflict and domination and lacks a conceptual space to understand how social practices change and evolve. In contrast, Bourdieu moves the conceptualisation of power back towards a concern with domination by keeping his model of power open to the exercise of strategic agency in order to shape societal structural relations. By integrating this perspective, Bourdieu is able to articulate power as a duality that can either transform or perpetuate structures of consensual domination (1984; 1989).

This view of power is addressed head-on by Laclau (1980) and Laclau and Mouffe (1987; 1985) which adopt a radical reinterpretation of Gramscian hegemony to identify a conceptual escape route from false consciousness, economic determinism and other normative concerns of classical Marxism by investigating the *discursive function* of power.

The focus on discourse arises from a post-structuralist ontology that argues reality and meaning is constituted through language, and in particular the destabilising

system of differences that generates meaning. This meaning is constructed relationally through the interaction of words rather than through any essentialist notion of meaning located in the underlying signification of language (Saussure, 1960). Laclau and Mouffe extend the epistemological relativism of purely linguistic discourse to discourses constituted by “the ensemble of phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place” (Laclau, 1980: 87). Adopting this interpretive position enables them to conclude that within society there exists “no single underlying principle fixing” meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). Such a perspective requires that earlier theories of power premised on a normative true or false consciousness (Bourdieu, 1984; Gramsci, 1971; Lukes, 1974)<sup>7</sup> or ontological security (Giddens, 1984) must be rejected. Equally, classical Marxist notions of economic determinism are also undermined as through Laclau and Mouffe’s reading even the economic is now discursive (Haugaard and Lenter, 2006: 48).

One fundamental problem arising from a discursive theory of power is that the relational logic of meaning creates a situation whereby an ultimate “transcendental signified” is absent and thus extends “the domain of play and signification infinitely” (Derrida 1978: 280 cited in Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). Thus, if meaning can never be fully fixed, how can power be exercised? Laclau and Mouffe respond to this critique by conceptualising power through “nodal points” that function as “privileged discursive points” partially fixing meaning “to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences” (*ibid.*).

These nodal points are generated through the use of “articulatory practices” (*ibid.*: 114-115) that are “constituted in the general field of discursivity” (*ibid.*) which, in Laclau and Mouffe’s radical Marxist project, is the liberal democratic framework of Western society. Within this framework, then, institutional actors strategically devise and implement articulatory practices in discourses relevant to their position in civil society in order to create nodal points and fix meaning in their favour. By locating power in the flow of discursive meaning any reference to a “transcendental or originary subject” (*ibid.*) disappears and the operational capacity of power, as well as its strategic management, is hidden within the consensual framework of liberal democracy.

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<sup>7</sup> Although it should be noted that Gramsci’s interpretation of true and false consciousness is perceptibly close to Laclau and Mouffe’s discursive approach in as much as he acknowledges the role of a relativistic and strategic selection of the most appropriate ideology necessary to derive power. See: Fontana (2006).

Laclau and Mouffe's account of power as a hegemonic discursive practice is not without critique, however. It can be argued that the Post-Marxist position from which they analyse power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987) risks limiting the wider potential of their theory by constraining it to considerations of democratic politics, however radical (Clegg, 1989: 183). A further critique is made by Bocoock (1986) who argues that certain articulatory practices operate as more durable practices that permanently fix meaning in society through what Clegg calls "essential nodality" (1989: 184). For example, money operating as a "cash nexus" creates an essential nodality by generating "purely external links between people in society" that "obscur[e] and mystif[y]" discursively symbolic social relationships (Bocoock, 1986: 108). Thus, it is the "impersonal" materiality of money that comes into play to stabilise and fix meaning by effectively placing it outside Laclau and Mouffe's discursive conceptualisation of power.

Despite these limitations, however, Laclau and Mouffe open the door for more explicit analyses of power's embeddedness within society's fabric. Such embeddedness potentially collapses agent-centric and structural traditions and dissolves power into complex networks of macro and micro-level, material and non-material instantiations characterised by the work of Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and Stewart Clegg, among others.

### **Constitutive Power: Networked Perspectives**

While Laclau and Mouffe's discursive theory of power operates within a liberal democratic framework – albeit from a radical Marxist perspective – Michael Foucault's extensive theoretical account of power<sup>8</sup> engages with, but importantly goes beyond the juridico-legal framework of modern democracies. Instead, Foucault turns his attention to accounting historically for the "modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects" (Foucault, 1983: 326).

Such a project marks a distinct break with both the conflictual and consensual traditions of power by opening up the possibility to conceive power as a productive force. Significantly, Foucault's analysis of power enables us to understand how

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<sup>8</sup> I will not be attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of Foucault's engagement with power given the scale and scope of his work and also the fact that Foucault's analyses of power emerge as "a unity with differences of emphasis rather than of fundamental substance" (Bernauer and Rasmussen 1987) For exemplary overviews of Foucault's work on power, see Haugaard (1997) and Clegg (1989)

power comes to constitute reality both discursively and through the creation and use of distinct disciplining apparatuses or *dispositifs*. As with Laclau and Mouffe, Foucault interprets power as not possessing a “distinct origin” or “basic nature” enacted through agency or structure to achieve causal outcomes. Rather power is a relational force “rooted in the whole network of the social” that “applies itself to immediate everyday life (Foucault, 1983: 345; 331). This form of power, Foucault asserts:

categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise and others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects (*ibid.*: 331).

As such, power operates from “*within* the social body, rather than *from above* it” (Foucault, 1980: 39) [emphasis in original] by establishing ‘domains’ of everyday practices (Foucault, 1977b: 194). This gives rise to a conception of power possessing constitutive – that is, positive, productive as opposed to negative, restrictive – capacities (Haugaard, 1997: 41). For example, within modern democracies individuals are given individual sovereignty by the government or state. In granting this freedom, however, the government or state gains the ability to regulate, control and modify individual behaviours without the need for physical domination.

In accordance with this principle, power acts as a form of subjectifying knowledge produced and managed through a range of discursive practices conceived as “systems of communication” (1983: 337). Building on Laclau and Mouffe (1985; 1987) and Bourdieu’s work (1984), these systems or “discursive formations” (Foucault, 1989: 38) constitute meaning and exercise power through the selective use and appropriation of language and other symbolic systems. In turn they become accepted within everyday life as a “language of truth” and thus gain power to define and shape individual subjectivities (Haugaard, 1997: 56).

In addition to this discursively-created power Foucault further identifies the application of “physical resources” or “objective capacities” to enforce “normal subjectivity” within society (Foucault, 1983: 337). The combination of discursive formations and material resources or capacities come to constitute disciplinary practices, or more specifically apparatuses (*dispositifs*) that function as a

“heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures [...] in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (Foucault, 1977a: 194). Examples identified in Foucault’s work include the surveillance and assessment of penal, educative and psychiatric institutions (Foucault, 1977b; 1984).

Foucault’s engagement with power culminates in the, arguably unfinished, development of a more generalised theory of power (Haugaard, 1997: 72). Emerging from his detailed yet diverse studies analysing power’s strategic deployment in social, medical and cultural institutions predominantly established during the early phases of industrial capitalism. Foucault’s work traces the outlines of what he terms “governmentality” (Foucault, 2009), which is understood as “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1983: 341). Governmentality yields a number of related and fecund concepts, such as biopolitics, biopolitical power and a concern for self-management through ‘technologies of the self’. Drawing together such concepts Foucault attempts to provide a generalised account of the way contemporary disciplinary apparatuses and technologies come to be applied to the regulation of – and resistance by – individuals (Foucault, 2008).

It can be argued, however, that the core elements of Foucault’s general theory of power have been realised in greater detail posthumously. For example, Deleuze (1992) asserts that post-World War II the dominant episteme of Foucault’s disciplinary society has been transformed into the Control Society. The Control Society has emerged, Deleuze argues, as a result of the proliferation of communication and computation technologies, such as telecommunication networks, the rise of computing, invention of the internet and rise of information-based economies.

Such an episteme, in turn, operates in close alignment with Foucault’s notion of biopolitical power – or biopower – and is marked by an intensification of apparatuses of governmentality whose functions become increasingly immanent to the social field. That is, while disciplinary power is exercised through “closed [...] and quantitative logics” that “fixed individuals within institutions but did not succeed in consuming them completely” in the control society Foucault’s biopower becomes premised on “open, qualitative and affective” relations (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 24)

that captures, controls and manipulates the entire body through the continual and real-time modulation of social relations, values and expectations (Deleuze, 1992).

Building on the Foucauldian interpellation of individuals into complex and immanent networks constituting the social field, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) arguably offers a “much more radical” (Munro, 2009: 132) theory of power than either Lukes (1974) or Foucault (1977b) articulated. ANT, like Foucauldian power, finds its key concepts and articulations diffused throughout studies within a number of scholarly fields.

ANT’s radical – as well as contested and controversial - agenda (Latour, 1998; 2005a) is one that attempts to renegotiate the relationships in society between micro- and macro-level and material and non-material entities (Callon and Latour, 1981).

Such a project asserts that society is not a concrete space constituted through individual agency or social structures but is rather “a *circulating* entity” [emphasis in original] (Latour, 1998: 17) that is best conceived as a network (in the Deleuzian rhizomatic sense<sup>9</sup>) - which is continually produced and transformed through the free association and interaction of actors (Law, 1998: 2).

Crucially, ANT draws inspiration from Foucault’s earlier deconstruction of the human sciences and rejects the anthropocentric dominance of social theories of power (Munro, 2009: 125). It refuses to allow the physicality or materiality of nature and the phenomenologically-based ‘social’ to play different parts in any analysis of power relations (Callon, 1986: 3). As a result, ANT conceptualises power through a “generalised symmetry” between material and social actors which must be interpreted agnostically to prevent a premature, anthropocentric determination of power while “the identity of the implicated actors ... is still being negotiated” (Callon, 1986: 3-4).

ANT’s conceptualisation of power is best exemplified through what its leading protagonists term the “sociology of translation” (Callon, 1986). This analytical mechanism accounts for how “networks of interest are actually constituted and reproduced through conscious strategies and unwitting practices constructed by the actors” (Clegg, 1989: 204). Translation typically occurs through four “moments” (Callon, 1986: 6-15): The first, problematisation, occurs when an actor or actors

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed, if obtuse, account of rhizomes and rhizomatic networks see Chapter 1 in Deleuze and Guattari (1987).



identify and articulate a specific problem or question, determine a network of actors requisite for its resolution and position themselves as an “obligatory passage point” through which all negotiations must pass prior to a solution being found. Obligatory passage points are operationally consanguineous to Laclau and Mouffe’s “nodal points” (1985) as both confer an indispensability on actor(s) by making them a “conduit through which traffic must necessarily pass” (Clegg, 1989: 205).

Once problematisation has occurred then actor(s) must seek out allies and lock them into place to solidify and support the resolution of their problem. This process is achieved through *interessement*, that is: the stabilisation of the identities of actors implicated in the problem and achieved through actor(s) coming between requisite allies and competing problematisations which present a potential source of tension in the model (Callon, 1986: 8-9). Significantly, *interessement* can utilise both material and/or immaterial actors, redefined as abstract or non-figurative “actants” (Latour, 2005a: 54; 71) prior to their stabilisation.

Thirdly, enrolment, refers to instances where *interessement* has been successful. That is, it “designates the device by which a set of interrelated roles is defined and attributed to actors who accept them” (Callon, 1986: 10). If all three moments are achieved, then the final process required for effective translation of interests occurs: the mobilisation of actors. Mobilisation refers to the methods and devices used to ensure that the interests defined initially are effectively represented by enrolled actors and do not “betray or undercut” (Clegg, 1989: 205) the representations needed to resolve the original problematisation. Once mobilisation has been achieved it’s possible to see how power has been exercised, then, through the negotiation and creation of a “constraining network of relationships” (Callon, 1986: 15).

This abstraction of power is, however, more complex when operationalised owing to the additional ANT notion of controversy (Callon, 1986: 16). Controversies are defined as either strategically planned or socially contingent events occurring within the generalised symmetry of ANT. Such events destabilise the representations of actors and, thus, challenge, problematise or undermine the translation process and consequently generates the need for continual (re)negotiation of an actor’s actions. ANT, then, presents a radical conceptualisation of power that attempts to account for the ways in which strategic actors and contingent non-human forces shape reality through associative and productive networks.

If ANT is perhaps best seen as a methodological or applied theory for mapping power within complex symbolic-material networks, Clegg (1989) establishes a more comprehensive framework for interpreting power from an organisational position. Recombining earlier agent-centric theories of power (Dahl, 1957) with post-modern or post-structuralist constitutive approaches (Callon, 1986; Foucault, 1977b; Law, 1986) Clegg devises a tripartite model of power characterised by relational “circuits” (Clegg, 1989). Each circuit instantiates a specific type of power, from agent-centric causality to the socially constructed domain and finally a constituting system determining the social domain, which operate across circuits simultaneously. The interaction between these multi-variant functions of power can be articulated as follows:

While episodic, one-dimensional conceptions of agency and power may tell us something about the nature of power relations between an already constituted A and B, it can tell us nothing about the constitutive nature of the relational field in which A and B presently are nor how this privileges and handicaps them respectively, in relation to those resources that are constituted as powerful (Clegg, 1989: 208-209).

In Clegg’s model, then, the conflictual approach to power is resurrected as a useful way of understanding episodic instances of direct causal agency where interests are exercised at an individual level, rather than, say, broader instances of the “constitutive agency of an ontologically instantiating human being” (*ibid.*: 187). More significantly, Clegg updates Dahl’s agent-centric notion of power by stressing that the constituting agency need not be human (*ibid.*). For example, Clegg expressly acknowledges that agency can be constituted through collective organisational decisions or expressed as more material forms, such as databases or other technological forms of control, providing an explicit link to Foucauldian and ANT perspectives on power. Episodic power can be understood as occurring, then, when there are “systematic relationships between agencies and events” that exist within a clearly “delimited framework” of wider social and systemic circuits of power (*ibid.*: 212).

Clegg’s second, ‘social’, circuit of power operates by “fixing or refixing relations of meaning and of membership [i.e. identity or subjectivity]” (*ibid.*: 224) in order to

strategically manage episodic power. For meaning and membership to become fixed, stable power relations have to be established through the creation of “obligatory passage points” which render power “solid, real and material” (*ibid.*: 207).

Problematically, the creation of obligatory passage points is highly contingent on the ability of episodic exercises of power to enrol other agencies, stabilise power networks and establish alliances that consequently fix meaning and membership (*ibid.*: 225). The process of successfully exercising episodic agency and stabilising power relations at a social level is a continual conflict. Furthermore, this conflict is itself embedded within and influenced by the third, constitutive circuit of power exercised at a systemic level.

Systemic power operates by constituting certain manifestations of dispositional power while preventing others from being realised. That is, depending on the particular constitution of systemic power: “[c]ertain fixtures of meaning are privileged, certain membership categories are aligned with these meanings [...] and, consequently, a specific organisational field [...] or ‘actor network’ is constructed” (*ibid.*). Importantly, however, given the contingent and fluid relationship between power within and across each circuit Clegg’s model remains open to destabilisation and transformation.

Central to this contingent transformation of social and systemic power is the concept of “organisational outflanking” (*ibid.*: 218) which can be adopted as both a strategy for social control as well as social change. For example, at a system-level, dominant actors in a system can use power strategically to establish a situation that prevents resistance by individuals. In turn, this creates an “absence of collective organisation to do otherwise” at a social level (Clegg, 1989: 226). Organisational outflanking, however, can also be adopted as a form of resistance to create change at a social and systemic level. Such change can be endogenous due to contingencies within episodic power outcomes that destabilise and transform meaning and membership; or due to innovation in the techniques used to facilitate systemic power, such as technological developments or collective action (Clegg, 1989: 224).

Alternatively, change can be exogenous due to the “result of environmental contingencies which disturb the fixed fields of force” within social or systemic circuits (Clegg, 1989: 224). As a result, Clegg outlines an increasingly

comprehensive and complex model that arguably brings us closer to an understanding of how micro and macro; material and non-material actors become enmeshed in networked flows of power.

Such a perspective highlights the potential of contemporary power to organise and shape reality through continually contested organising processes shaped both from within and through externalities. which, importantly, incorporate material as well as symbolic components. These developments in the field of power are crucial as they provide a conceptual framework for contemporary articulations of power and, moreover, provide a direction and set of qualities which will enable a deeper identification and understanding of the shape of contemporary media power.

### **The Liberal Media and Power**

The modern, liberal, mass media emerged from the political transformation of modern democracy that occurred in the eighteenth-century when early democratic models were subjected to social and economic pressures forcing them to expand and enfranchise greater numbers of individuals in society (Curran, 2002). This transformation led to a model of mass democracy that developed a symbiotic relationship with mass media and “enormously strengthened” the democratisation of British – and later American – society (Curran, 2002: 4-5; Louw, 2005: 8-48).

According to this interpretation, the liberal media operates as an institution that performs a number of important functions in the maintenance of democratic society. Firstly, the liberal media acts as a “watchdog” (Keane, 1991: 16) to keep a check on abuses of power; it also works to improve “the circulation of ideas and information in society, making government more transparent [...] improving the level of debate” (Louw, 2005: 45) and finally, by doing so, enables rational decision-making to take place (Curran, 2002: 225-227).

The normative framework most often deployed for understanding liberal media’s engagement with power is Habermas’ public sphere (Curran, 2002; Dahlgren, 1995; Bennett and Entman, 2001; Davis, 2007).<sup>10</sup> Habermas (1989) asserts that in the

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<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive overview of alternative models see Curran J. (2002). *Media and Power*, London: Routledge.

eighteenth-century society underwent a structural transformation that gave rise to a “public sphere” - a public space

where access to information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis (Curran, 2002: 233)

Arising from this transformation members of society can “collectively determine through rational argument the way in which they wish to see society develop” and in turn help shape government policy (*ibid.*). Used selectively, Habermas’ model offers a largely unproblematic conceptualisation of liberal media built on rational debate, scrutiny of government and concern for a greater public good (*ibid.*: 33).

Critics, however, argue that the broader implications of Habermas’ model present significant challenges to an optimistic interpretation of mass media power.

Pragmatic critiques levelled at the public sphere include the over-idealisation of rational debate as a product of a specific historical and cultural milieu based around coffee-houses and a fully independent press (*ibid.*). Moreover, they assert that the notion of the public sphere belies the historical reality of media power in mass democracy whereby the mass media - free from earlier monarchical and government constraints slowly became “refeudalised” (*ibid.*: 34) by the mass industrial corporations, bourgeois elites interest groups and ideologically aligned political parties emerging from mass industrial capitalism.

Such a refeudalisation, critics argued, replaced a public sphere premised on individualism and a free media with the new imperative of manipulating mass opinion and shaping ideological beliefs to meet commercial or other elite interests (Thompson, 1990). In response to these criticisms Habermas (1996) updated his conceptualisation of the public sphere to account for the modern mass media’s role within an extended civil society and its capitulation to corporate power.

Rather than a single space, the public sphere becomes “a network for communicating information and points of view” (Habermas, 1996: 360) which are then connected to the central political core via a series of peripheral civil society actors and groups, such as voluntary associations, private associations, social movements, unions among others. Despite the revision of the public sphere into what Gitlin (1998) terms

“public sphericules” a fundamental limitation remains in its preoccupation with homogenous groups or audiences located within clearly bordered regions or nation-states. Such a perspective, Curran (2002) asserts, is rendered problematic by the effects of globalisation, social fragmentation and the emergence of a more complex social structure based upon dynamic networks (Castells, 1996; Curran, 2002: 234).

From within the realms of such socio-economic and technological transformations further critiques have emerged challenging the idealised Habermasian notion of rational, pluralist political participation by citizens informed through free civic discourse (Bennett and Entman, 2001; Dahlgren and Gurevitch, 2005; Stanyer, 2008). Such perspectives argue that in reality media power in modern democracies is increasingly influenced by political power (Cook, 1998; Esser et al., 2001). McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod have gone as far as to assert that: “the center of the new political system appears to be the media” (McLeod, Kosicki and McLeod cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 3).

Crucially, within this modern political-media environment a broader network of informal, yet increasingly professionalised, participants extending beyond Habermas’ formal civil society actors become enrolled. These participants include politicians, their political advisers, public opinion researchers and professional communicators and have come to constitute a complex and dynamic political communications system (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 11-25; Stanyer, 2008: 3-4).

This emergence of this system has been in part due to wider historical forces that have led to a decline in once strong mass collective political identities, shared societal values and cultural experiences generated by traditionally dominant party ideologies (Bennett, 2003a; Dalton, 1999; Dalton, 2000). Such forces have been identified as part of the turn towards a contemporary society where a reflexive modernity (Beck, 1997) or post-industrialism (Norris, 2000) has created a “sub-political” (Beck, 1997) or “lifestyle” politics (Bennett, 1998). In turn, this new form of politics is characterised by political expression based on personal identity and political behaviour no longer confined to voting or collective action:

The psychological energy ... people once devoted to the grand political projects of economic integration and nation-building in industrial democracies is now increasingly directed toward personal projects of managing and

expressing complex identities in a fragmenting society. (Bennett, 1998: 755)

This dynamic is amplified further by through globalisation and modernisation, leading to increasingly diverse and multi-cultural societies (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Swanson and Mancini, 1995). In response to these trends the media has adopted an increasingly market-focused position (Murdock and Golding, 2005: 10-11; Stanyer, 2008) that places political or democratic discourse in direct competition with other consumer or lifestyle-focused communications (Bennett, 2003a; Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999).

As a result, the public interest dominated discourses of the early, liberal mass media typified by Habermas' public sphere becomes marginalised (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2005: 106-107) and the traditional distinctions between political/democratic reporting and entertainment collapses. As "publics are more defined around consumer values," Slater (2001) argues, "the discourses of public life become discourses of consumption far removed from the array of issues in the policy sphere" (Slater, 2001: 21).

Such a "diverse, fragmented and complex" (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999: 209; Bennett, 1998) media environment has led to the increasing professionalisation of political communications and media production processes (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 15-17; Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Scammell, 1995) and created a political environment in which

power relations among key message providers and receivers are being rearranged; the culture of political journalism is being transformed; and conventional meanings of "democracy" and "citizenship" are being questioned and rethought. (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999: 209)

Media power, then, is represented as an "increasing struggle to control and influence popular perceptions of key [democratic] events" using "news management" techniques (Blumler, 1990: 103). Although highly dependent on external variables, such as public support, proximity to elections or key democratic events, political communication can be strategically implemented to manage news owing to the way the media - and news production in particular - functions as a set of institutionalised practices (Louw, 2005: 72-84; Tuchman, 1978).

Features of such institutional news management include routinised information gathering, cyclical news-cycles, normative criteria for sourcing information as well as ingrained organisational cultures and values (Louw, 2005; Tuchman, 1978). As a consequence, political communicators are able to manage newsgathering inputs and production to influence public opinion. Drawing on early studies of dominant news management techniques identified in UK and US contexts, Denton and Woodward demonstrate how political communicators “define, justify, legitimate, persuade and inspire more effectively” (1998: 184) through agreeing and aligning media messages; crafting communications adapted specifically for mass media, e.g. sound-bites for use in time-sensitive news bulletins, and planning their targeted dissemination (McNair, 2003: 141; Scammell, 1995; Stanyer, 2008: 47-50). More recently studies have plotted two fundamental shifts in news management. Firstly, media management has shifted from key events in democratic life-cycles (Blumler, 1990: 103), such as elections, wars and major policy decisions (Davis, 2007: 3) to a continual exertion of media power located in “metacoverage” (Esser et al., 2001) or “process coverage” (McNair, 2000: 50; Stanyer, 2008: 65; McNair, 2003: 144-145).

Such a shift accounts for the ways in which the media “self-referentially and self-consciously diverges from its customary role as a conduit of information to one of reporting on how it is one of the actors on the ... stage” (Esser et al., 2001: 17) thus creating a situation where journalists “meta-communicate the awareness that they are being manipulated and attempt to publicly deconstruct its purpose” (D'Angelo, 1999: 6). On one hand this may be seen as a useful practice revealing the hitherto hidden practices of strategic news management. Research, however, has indicated that metacoverage functions primarily as a “defense strategy” for the media, rather than as a tool with which to educate the public about the political and power-driven media processes taking place (Esser et al., 2001: 40-41).

Secondly, the internet-enabled empowerment of individuals has yielded a more central role in mediating political events for ordinary citizens or new types of non-professional or informal media actors, such as bloggers and ‘citizen journalists’ (Lasica, 2003; Rosen, 2008). This increasingly informal media environment is challenging traditional approaches to political communication where predominantly one-way, mass media outlets and the strategic management of the news-cycle enabled political and professional media actors to control communication flows.



With the rise of the internet and social media political communication has become increasingly characterised by accessibility, porosity, informational openness and competitiveness (McNair, 2006: 199).

This new media landscape, according to Chadwick and Stanyer, creates “a more open, fluid political opportunity structure [...] that increasingly enables the British public to exert its influence and hold politicians and media to account” (Chadwick and Stanyer, 2010: 2). All of which transformations lead to a reality where it has become more important than ever before to go beyond just ‘selling’ a political party, leader or government policy during key periods of democratic governance. Instead news or media management requires a “perpetual” or “permanent” political communications strategy (Needham, 2005; Nimmo, 1999; Norris, 2000) that increasingly needs to become “all-encompassing” (Stanyer, 2008: 43) in order to engage with and respond to the increasingly grassroots and amateur-driven media power of the day-to-day political realm.

### **Media Power: Critical Approaches**

While some scholars interpret the changes in political communication and news management as having a positive outcome on information accessibility and political accountability (McNair, 2000; Norris, 2000; Popkin, 2006), others view developments as further supporting evidence for the erosion of democracy and accretion of elite – predominantly corporate - power. Such advocates for a critical interpretation of media power attempt to demonstrate the ways in which dominant interests use the media to exert social control without recourse to the use of force (Davis, 2007: 2) and to prevent democratic “legitimation crises” (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 2; Habermas, 1976; Castells, 2009: 12) from occurring.

At the core of these accounts is the assertion that dominant elites exploit the media’s structural functions by leveraging a range of economic, political and/or cultural connections (Davis, 2007: 4). Economic interpretations of media power, for example, draw their impetus from broadly classical Marxist analyses of the media’s political role in dominating public thought by perpetuating an ideology or false consciousness aligned with capitalist or ‘elite’ interests. The media’s output, then, both reproduces capitalist social structures and maximises economic value. Such deterministic thinking can be traced directly to Marx and Engels’ early work, in particular *The German Ideology*:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas (Marx and Engels, 1932)

One of the most defining applications of this approach to media power can be found in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here the authors critique the mass media as a set of institutions that standardise and mass-produce cultural forms and content in order to satisfy a public demand, itself generated by the industries using mass-marketing techniques (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1989: 120-168).

In this "culture industry" media model (*ibid.*: 121), the mass public or citizens become consumers and considered as "not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would like to have us believe, not its subject but its object" (Adorno, 1973: 12). As a consequence of this commercial objectification the culture industry seeks to simplify and idealise reality through popular culture, which in turn standardises and homogenises public expectations and behaviour creating a consensual status quo that perpetuates domination by the ruling elites (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1989: 131-134).

This domination is managed and maintained through the establishment of false choices, created by the culture industry to maintain a façade of autonomy and thus engender a false or unobtainable potential for social change:

The ruthless unity in the culture industry is evidence of what will happen in politics. Marked differentiations ... depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organising, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasised and extended ... Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his

previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type. (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1989: 123)

As a result, opportunities for the emergence of truly democratic debate or social change through media power are not only foreclosed but excluded and prevented from even occurring in the first instance (Adorno, 1973; Louw, 2005).

Horkheimer and Adorno's Marxist analyses of the culture industry mark an important theoretical development in critical approaches of media power – albeit one generated in response to a specific set of American political, economic and cultural phenomena (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 324-325). Building on this foundational work, contemporary studies into the political economy of the media have downplayed overt economically-determinist Marxist analyses in favour of a more pragmatic approach to political economy, taking into account the complex, globalised and informational economies in which the media currently operates (Murdock and Golding, 2005; Schudson, 2005).

Reprising Horkheimer and Adorno's earlier account in a contemporary context, it is argued that the economic priorities of mass media result in a failure for media power to be compatible with the normative ideals of the liberal media model. Studies show how capitulation to market-demands undermines democratic discourse as it aligns media output with dominant economic and political perspectives limiting debate and arguably reproducing a false consciousness which focuses media output on uncritical and 'safe' entertainment or lifestyle content that limits the potential for the public to critically appraise political or corporate interests (Curran, 2002; Curran and Seaton, 2003; Davis, 2007; Herman and McChesney, 1998; McChesney, 1999; McChesney, 2004). These micro-level accounts of media output are complemented by broader macro-level studies examining the way media ownership and control is becoming ever more concentrated into a smaller number of key corporations (Bagdikian, 2000; Castells, 2009) thus making it easier for dominant interests to mediate power in ways that limit democratic discourse.

One of the most enduring contributions to the contemporary literature on the political economy of the mass media is Herman and Chomsky's (1994) work on how the mass media exert power in ways that manufactures popular consent on behalf of state and private interests. Combining the micro and macro accounts the media outlined above

Herman and Chomsky challenge the popular assertion that the mass media derive news from unbiased and objective criteria and instead seek to account for the forces that cause mass media to produce “propaganda”, described as “the processes whereby [the media] mobilise bias, and the patterns of news choice that ensue” (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: lix-lx).

This analysis is achieved through the construction of a propaganda model, “an analytical framework that ... explain[s] the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate” (*ibid.*: xi). This framework identifies five factors that Herman and Chomsky use to account for the dominance of state and corporate propaganda in media power: size, ownership and profit orientation of media companies; advertising revenues as primary income source; control of news sources; “flak” (i.e. unofficial or covert regulation); and manipulation of broader social themes, e.g. anti-communism or the war on terror (*ibid.*: 2).

Although Herman and Chomsky’s work identifies and applies a convincing theoretical framework to a comprehensive, critical analysis of mass media it nevertheless has been critiqued for its problematic adherence to the idealistic media “control paradigm” (McNair, 2006) as well as its over-emphasis of the media’s power to instil propagandist views among the mass public (Curran, 2002: 139-141). Despite these limitations, however, Herman and Chomsky crucially move critical analyses of media power beyond a preoccupation with media ownership and production by acknowledging the increasing significance of news sources and public relations as an important ‘mechanism of elite influence’ in mediating power (Herman and Chomsky, 1994: xvii).

This increased role of professional political and media actors in mediating power has led to a proliferation of studies critically analyzing the rise in modern public relations (PR) (Cottle, 2003; Davis, 2000; Davis, 2002; Davis, 2003; Franklin, 2004; Scammell, 1995). The study of PR, Cottle asserts, “takes us to the heart of key concerns and debates about the media’s relation to wider systems and structures of power” (Cottle, 2003: 3). In doing so, it provides a more complex perspective on media power that goes beyond economically and politically determinist accounts reliant on propagandist media effects for social control.

Such an account is supported by Davis (2002) whose extensive research into the use of political and corporate PR in the UK reveals an interpretation of media power more widely dispersed within society and less economically determined than previously thought (Davis 2002, 6). Davis (2000; Davis, 2002; Davis, 2003) examines the use of PR by official and non-official news sources, such as trade unions and NGOs, and concludes that the production of power is a highly contested process in which cultural capital plays an equal part as economic capital:

Because PR does not necessarily rely on large capital expenditure, or the possession of a high degree of institutional legitimacy, more organisations, not fewer, are likely to achieve access that was hitherto denied them ... set agendas and, on occasion, quite significantly disrupt their official and corporate counterparts (Davis, 2000: 54)

As a result, neither political nor economic power is necessarily enough for media dominance (Davis, 2000: 40). Instead, media power is achieved through four inter-related – yet independent – factors: economic capital; cultural capital; human resources and the strategic application of PR (*ibid.*: 54). While related, each factor ultimately functions independently; nor are factors exclusively available to official or non-official organisations or media actors.

For example, while corporations have greater access to economic and human resources, they typically struggle to generate cultural capital; conversely while NGOs may not match corporate economic resources, they can outmanoeuvre corporations through their ability to generate cultural capital and mobilise human resources through their volunteer or supporter networks. As a result, the rise of public relations creates an interpretation of media power where the ability for a diverse range of institutional and non-institutional actors to possess the resources necessary to influence outcomes is much more open to contestation than previously thought. As Davies, concludes: “The rise of professional public relations means that institutions and corporations can further extend their media influence in the long-term, but also that non-official sources have also gained a new means of access” (*ibid.*: 55).

The notion that media power is an essentially contested process constituted by a range of factors going beyond the purely economic is further reinforced by cultural

analyses of media power. Such cultural critiques have predominantly adopted structural Marxist perspectives (Hall, 1986a) as a way to analyse the role ideology plays in enabling dominant groups to “grip the minds of masses” (Hall, 1986b: 2). Interpreted as such, ideology determines everyday cultural values, that is, the

mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation - which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works. (*ibid.*: 29)

This interpretation presents ideology as “a ‘system of representations’ ... through which we live” (Proctor, 2004: 45) rather than a classical Marxist false consciousness aligned with the problematic media “control paradigm” (McNair, 2006). As a result, media power becomes “encoded” in a particular way by the mass media and subsequently “decoded” by the public – either in a related or potentially unrelated way to its encoding (Hall, 1973).

Drawing on Althusserian notions of “relative autonomy” and “over-determination” Hall (1973: 129) articulates a “model of communication in which meaning does not reside at, nor can be guaranteed by, any particular moment” of the production of media power (Proctor, 2004: 61). This fundamentally transforms media’s power from a passive sender/receive relationship – inherent in both the political-economic control paradigm and the behaviouralism of liberal mass communication models - to one where meaning is actively produced, consumed and reproduced through the linguistic interplay of culturally conative and denotive signs present in the media (*ibid.*: 132-133).

While this culturally created meaning is generated with a greater degree of autonomy than that acknowledged by earlier paradigms, it remains, however, structured by wider political discourses. Culturally active semiotic codes, Hall asserts, are:

*not* equal among themselves. Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order* ...mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into *dominant or preferred meanings*. (*ibid.*: 134) [emphasis in original]

Media power within a critical cultural framework, then, is a contested process existing along a preferred, negotiated and oppositional axis of meaning, albeit one prefigured by the wider everyday “meanings, practices and beliefs” (*ibid.*: 134-138) embedded in wider social, institutional and political power (Hall *et al.*, 1978).

While Hall’s highly influential work has informed a significant body of cultural research into active audiences resistant to Herman and Chomsky’s media propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, 1994) it is also increasingly being challenged by critical cultural scholars who assert that the “close structural link between the economic, cultural and socio-political power ... fails to account for the complex dynamics of the twenty-first-century media system” (McNair, 2006: viii-ix).

McNair (2006) recognises the cultural and semiotic autonomy of Hall’s work but challenges the structural determinism inherent in his work on the grounds of weakened institutional structures in contemporary society. These institutional challenges are marked by a shift from the industrial “control paradigm” to a post-industrial, “chaos paradigm” in which advanced capitalism - characterised by political volatility and media instability - transforms media power from “ideological control” to “anarchy and disruption; to the possibilities allowed for ... dissent, openness and diversity” (McNair, 2006: vii).

At the heart of this emerging paradigm is a non-linear conceptualisation of media power determined by globalised, internet-enabled, 24/7 news cycles. A key factor driving this transformation is what McNair terms the “end of ideology” (*ibid.*: 74-87). This is understood as the reality that both the need and ability of dominant groups to generate and construct preferred meanings in a contemporary, globalised, multi-cultural society has declined:

the ideological bi-polarity of the cold war had, by defining the limits to legitimate controversy or consensus, acted as a policing mechanism for journalists on both sides of the geo-strategic divide. When it ended, so did the need for cultural policing. Consensus was replaced by dissensus (*ibid.*: 83)

The rise of a dissensual fragmentation of society arguably increases the independence of both media and its audiences. McNair argues the media has become

empowered to report with a greater flexibility and greater autonomy from dominant groups as evidenced by a “hyper-adversarialism” (*ibid.*: 71) and an increase in meta- or process coverage that reveals and analyses attempts by dominant groups to manage – or control – media content. At the same time, technological developments, such as phone-ins, public panel discussions and increasingly internet-enabled and empowered individuals authoring blogs and using tools such as Twitter to shape public discourse, have led to a rise in participatory media and given audiences “mediated access” to once isolated institutions and processes (*ibid.*: 66).

As a result, a diverse and increasingly amateur or informal set of media actors are routinely given a role to play in influencing and shaping the structural domains of media power. It is important to note, however, that such a “pragmatic cultural optimism” (*ibid.*: viii) offered by McNair can be critiqued from orthodox critical perspectives as representing merely “calculated mutations” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1989: 129) within capitalism’s totalising system, rather than a radical break with systemic dominance.

Despite this, McNair’s perspective on media power remains significant in as much as it highlights the contemporary reality that

the link between economic base and cultural superstructure is weakened. New information and communication technologies have not ended the concentration of media ownership ... But they have enabled an environment in which the latter are obliged in their own self-interest to share the public sphere with an increasingly diverse range of editorial viewpoints and voices (McNair, 2006: 93)

Media power within a post-industrial chaos paradigm, then, is much more fluid than conceived by politically or economically deterministic accounts of the media. Contemporary media power “ebbs and flows between locations and centres” undermining the perceived dominance and “security” of traditional accounts (McNair, 2006: 203).

### **Networked Media Power**

One of the defining characteristics of the contemporary media landscape’s metamorphosis from an industrial, control paradigm to a post-industrial chaos



paradigm has been the emergence and exponential growth globalised telecommunications networks and the internet. This shift has radically altered the scope and role of media power by transforming networked communication from a very old form of human practice and interaction traditionally restricted to private, localised environments or outperformed by centralised, industrial forms of organisation (Castells, 2001: 1-2) into “the archetypal form of contemporary social and technical organisation” (Livingstone, 2005: 12).

Such a phenomenon has been conceived at a societal, economic, political and cultural level by early theorists as either the “network society” (Castells, 1996) or “networked information economy” (Benkler, 2006). Without doubt these continually evolving transformations have had a significant impact on public communications, the media and subsequently media’s power. At the same time, however, the emergence of such a complex networked communications environment has equally challenged the capability of research to adjust to the “pace of change” (Castells, 2001: 3). As Livingstone (Livingstone, 2005: 11) has observed, the study of networked media and communications is “less institutionalised than, say, media studies or cultural studies,” political science or political communication.

In response, scholars have developed a number of typologies for interpreting literature on networked media, communications and politics (Chadwick, 2009; Chadwick and Howard, 2009; Livingstone, 2005; Wellman, 2004). Chadwick (2009) and Chadwick and Howard (2009) in particular draw a distinction between optimistic/positive and pessimistic/negative schools of thought. In their typology optimistic approaches view networked media as redressing the balance of power away from dominant elites and returning it to individuals, while pessimistic perspectives interpret networked media as reinforcing existing power structures, albeit in new forms.

Significantly, Chadwick and Howard introduce a third position they term “surprising” (Chadwick and Howard, 2009: 424-426) to account for research that seems to introduce an unforeseen or unrecognised complexity into the interpretation of networked politics and communication. This typology will be adopted throughout the remainder of this chapter to review existing literature on networked media power. However, I propose adopting the third “surprising” perspective and reinterpreting it

as representative of emergent studies that introduce novel or unique analyses or insights into the literature.

Optimistic analyses of the networked communications environment have emerged primarily articulating a continued preoccupation with the Habermasian public sphere due in large part to the internet's perceived ability to empower and connect individuals in a global public discourse that facilitates "communicative links between citizens and the power holders of society" (Dahlgren, 2005: 148). Broadly speaking, studies into the "networked public sphere" (Benkler, 2006: 176-177) have largely arisen from extant debates within literature on mass media (Dahlgren, 2001; 2005; McNair, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009) that aim to understand how the structure and content of a mass mediated public space can be revitalised by the internet's expanded and accelerated information flow and increased interactivity between participants (McNair, 2009: 221-223).

Marking a conceptual break with mass media and political science scholarship, however, Yochai Benkler (2006) addresses the public sphere debate from the perspective of the "networked information economy" (Benkler, 2006: 6-7) that conceptualises the networked communication environment as having "fundamentally altered the capacity of individuals ... to be active participants ... as opposed to passive readers, listeners or viewers" in the production of power (*ibid.*: 212). Benkler argues that such an account of the networked media environment is closely aligned with Habermas' model of the public sphere although is more capable of accounting for the social and cultural complexity of modern democracies. This is achieved by empowering networked individuals to act collectively as a liberal "watchdog, a source of salient observations regarding matters of public concern, and a platform for discussing the alternatives open to a polity" (*ibid.*: 271).

A further reason for optimism in analyses of networked media is the distributed communications architecture of the internet and the low capital requirements for producing and distributing information. Both Benkler (Benkler, 2006) and Castells (2009) believe this enables anyone with internet access to mediate power. This "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009: 65-72) transforms traditional mass media power – typified as "more centralised, homogeneous and less pluralistic" (Beckett and Mansell, 2008: 4) into a decentralised, heterogeneous "social communication process" (Benkler, 2006: 181) characterised by a diverse and pluralistic range of

participants (Bimber, 1998) and offering “avenues for citizen independence from mainstream news media and larger social forces” (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009: 197). In addition to the representative diversity offered by the radical pluralism offered by the networked media environment, its structural features further strengthen its resilience to state or corporate control.

As decentralised and distributed networks, media production processes emerging from digitally-enabled actors often lack a single central point of control thus making it difficult to contain or censor contentious or politically sensitive information. This inevitably leads to “the emergence of multiple axes of information [that] provide new opportunities for citizens to challenge elite control of political issues” (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2004: 1209) and enhances “the potential for the media to exercise accountability over power” (McNair, 2006: 229).

Tewksbury and Rittenberg see this as a “democratisation of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of news and information” (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009: 197) while Castells (2007; 2009) goes further by asserting that mass self-communication” empowers individuals to “challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalised in society” (Castells, 2007: 248).

Such individual and collective efforts to challenge and transform societal power relations have been identified within extra-democratic forms, such as networked social movements, which use the internet to share information, coordinate and instantiate action (Bennett, 2003b; Castells, 2007; Castells, 2009; Chadwick, 2007) as well as in the traditional political realm where networked communications facilitate an increased engagement with and participation in democratic institutions (Bimber, 2000; Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009; Bimber, 2003; Hardy and Scheufele, 2005; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003).

Although most scholars agree that the emergent networked communications environment is “bringing together individual citizens and informal networks through interconnected global webs of public communication” (Curran and Witschge, 2010: 102), analyses of the internet as a force rejuvenating a global public sphere are not without extensive critique. Pessimistic analyses of the newly networked public sphere draw attention to the issue of internet access. Significant portions of global societies are on the wrong side of the “digital divide” (Dijk, 2005) thus universal

participation is likely to be significantly limited (Curran and Witschge, 2010; Dahlgren, 2001; Sparks, 2001) or biased towards affluent elites (Sparks, 2001: 83).

Pessimist scholars have also questioned whether participation in the contemporary networked media environment is typified by the type of civic discourse idealised in the Habermasian model. Alternatively, they argue that the broader trends of media production and power are characterised by political and civic disengagement and an increased focus on lifestyle or entertainment content (Curran and Witschge, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010: 112-125; Sparks, 2001). Bimber (2000) observes that even where networked communications are adopted for political purposes, they “deinstitutionalise politics, fragment communication, and accelerate the pace of the public agenda and decision making” (Bimber, 2000: 333) rendering any notion of a viable public sphere incoherent.

Similarly, Papacharissi (2009) reminds us that, above all, notions of an internet-enabled Habermasian public sphere can be only idealistic:

Romanticised retrospectives of past and future civic engagement often impose language and expectations that curtail the true potential of technologies of the present. The public sphere can be helpful in critiquing and contextualising the political role of online media, but not in prescribing that role (Papacharissi, 2009: 243)

Further critique of networked media’s liberal effects include the replication of offline media consumption habits (Schoenbach et al., 2005; Hargittai, 2006; Tewksbury, 2003). That is, while networked media enables people to democratically select information to consume, this is usually at the exclusion of political information (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009: 194) or limited to content sharing their similar personal or political beliefs (Lawrence et al., 2010; Sunstein, 2007).

Critical or pessimetic perspectives of networked media also draw impetus from the continued dominance of the political economic critiques carried over from mass media research. For example, Hargittai, (2004) Mansell (2004) and Dahlberg (2005) assert that the offline dominance of media power by commercial elites is now being replicated online through the “corporate colonisation of cyberspace” (Dahlberg, 2005: 160) and as a result is weakening the internet’s potential for strengthening

public discourse. This leads to an “elite hold” where despite a perceived “communicative abundance” generated by networked media’s low barriers to entry (Karppinen, 2009) the elite mass media are structurally and economically outmanoeuvring networked civic communication (Castells, 2007; Castells, 2009; Karppinen, 2009; Stanyer, 2009) by “hijacking” social communication tools, such as blogs, to continue their dominance in mediating power (Meraz, 2009).

While this perspective argues that dominant nodes in media networks are created through political or economic power, research indicates that even among grassroots and non-elite networked media the apparent natural tendency is for a small number of ‘elite’ sites to emerge and dominate media power (Hindman et al., 2003; Hindman, 2008). Pessimistic accounts of networked communications also draw attention to the limitations of individual agency in challenging the dominance of elite media power when such interpersonal networks are embedded in and largely constituted by predominantly “bourgeois” structures and the normative consumer capitalist values of contemporary society (Sparks, 2001: 89-92).

As a result, despite the increased democratisation of media production, Williams and Delli Carpini remain

skeptical of the ordinary citizens to make use of these opportunities and suspicious of the degree to which even multiple axes of power are still shaped by more fundamental forces of economic and political power (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2004: 1209)

Articulating Williams and Delli Carpini’s pessimistic suggestion in more detail, Dean (2010) and Terranova (2004a) argue that economic and political forces go further than influence the networked public’s ability to mediate power. Rather, they assert that dominant forces co-opt and use the illusion of increased individual agency and empowerment offered by networked media to conceal a total atrophy of political power.

For Dean, the convergence of democratic ideals, such as participation and open access, and capitalism’s colonisation of the networked media environment gives rise to a “communicative capitalism” (Dean, 2010: 4-5) which captures political power in an ever-increasing “displacement of political conflict to the terrain of networked

media” (*ibid.*: 124). Moreover, every “click and interaction made in the networked media environment can be traced, capitalised and sold” (*ibid.*) as “free labour” creating a “blurred territory between production and consumption, work and cultural expression” (Terranova, 2004a: 73-94) where individuals are potentially assimilated into and dominated by a capitalist “social factory” (*ibid.*: 74).

It should be evident, then, that the adoption of optimistic/liberal and pessimistic/critical approaches for analysing networked media power draw heavily on dominant paradigms from within the mass media and communication literature. As a result, while recognising the representational and structural transformations the internet brings to mass media, any attempt at an adequate analysis risks being locked into an “alternatively revolutionary or evolutionary” dichotomy (Mansell, 2004: 7) that “tends to treat media choice, source choice, and interactivity habits as distinct areas of inquiry” (Howard and Chadwick, 2009: 431).

A number of scholars, however, have questioned the usefulness of adopting mass media approaches to interpret the new, networked media space (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001; Meraz, 2007: 78), instead arguing that we have reached the limit of the mass media paradigm:

researchers need to resist the temptation to simply apply old models of mass communication to the new media. Because of fundamental differences between the old and new technologies ... new theories of media uses and impacts must be developed and tested (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001: 378).

Initial efforts to empirically analyse this emergent space between old and new media have predominantly been located in studies examining the “intermedia agenda setting dynamics” (Meraz, 2009: 684) of social and traditional media platforms.

These studies broadly indicate that as more and more journalists tap into virally distributed information via their online “interpersonal networks” (Chadwick, 2011a: 5) social media – and in particular, blogs – can shape the mainstream news agenda (Collister, 2008; Cornfield et al., 2005; Davis, 2009; Farrell and Drezner, 2008; Meraz, 2009; Messner and DiStaso, 2008) or erode the traditional gate-keeping role of traditional media (Bennett, 2004; Bruns, 2005; Meraz, 2007; Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000; Williams and Delli Carpini, 2004).

These individual studies provide us with a glimpse of a theoretical approach to this newly emerging media landscape that Chadwick has termed the “hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2017) characterised by “complex assemblages in which the personnel, practices, genres, technologies, and temporalities of supposedly “new” online media are hybridised with those of supposedly “old” broadcast and press media” (Chadwick, 2011a). Applying this system-level approach to an analysis of UK case studies Chadwick (2011a; 2011b) identifies a range of emergent phenomena that transforms media power from its earlier evolutionary or revolutionary dichotomy to a set of “evolving power relations based upon adaptation and interdependence” (Chadwick, 2011c: 3). Crucially, the hybrid media system enables us to conceptualise the media power as an endlessly contested flow of information arcing between official and unofficial, elite and non-elite, offline and online networks (Chadwick, 2017). Always in flux and characterised by complexity and contestable veracity, the nature of media power in the hybrid media system must “by its very nature remain “unfinished” (Bruns, 2005: 57).

If Chadwick provides a system-level perspective of an emergent and hybrid networked communication space, Terranova (Terranova, 2004a; Terranova, 2004b) further problematises networked media power by exposing a deeper complexity at work, understood as the emergence of a “network culture” (Terranova, 2004a: 38). Providing a context for network culture, Terranova introduces the concept of an “informational milieu”, that is: an open, networked communicative space that operates both at a material and representational level (Terranova, 2004b: 52).

Crucially, the material aspect of the milieu goes beyond the fundamental liberal, cultural and political economic interpretations of media by challenging the notion that information claims to have a link with what it represents. In a culturally networked space, media production is best addressed “less as a question of meanings that are encoded and decoded but as ... new forms of knowledge and power” (*ibid.*) that are constituted by an unstable, complex set of physical states continually in flux that “can only describe a distribution of probabilities rather than an essential property that defines a being” (*ibid.*: 64).

Understood as such, media power occurs through and informational dynamics”, a nonlinear and nondeterministic material process that behaves as a “transductive

arrow” (*ibid.*: 69) actualising the virtual probabilities flowing through the networked communicative space. Thus, media power is enacted as “a form of control over the fluctuations of an unstable physical milieu” (*ibid.*). This radically alters conventional perspectives of media power that have traditionally been interpreted as the distribution of representational messages from sender to receiver(s). Instead, communication operating in this way is revealed as only accounting for one-half of the media production process:

On the one hand, it involves a physical operation on metastable material processes that it captures as probabilistic and dynamic states; on the other hand, it mobilises a signifying articulation that inserts such description into the networks of signification that make it meaningful. (*ibid.*: 70)

Further reinforcing and clarifying the significance of symmetry between the symbolic and material dimensions of media power, contemporary scholars increasingly draw on the work of German media theorist Friedrich Kittler whose technologically-determinist approach identifies important questions in relation to the explicit physicality of media and locates media power entirely within its material form and processes (1992; 1999).

Following such a perspective, any dichotomies hitherto identified between liberal-critical and individual-structural divides are challenged by the view that human agency in media power is “not a self-determined actor” but rather “embedded in and emerg[ing] from a field of material relations” (Bollmer, 2015: 96). Packer (2013) further asserts that by “determin[ing] the brute facticity of what data are selected, stored, and processed”, media “make[s] possible new forms of knowledge” (*ibid.*: 296). Interpreted as such, media power becomes an “effect of technological storage and information transmission ... in which technologies structure possibilities for perception, knowledge, and politics” (*ibid.*).

Tempering these technological deterministic, even “anti-humanist” (Bollmer, 2015: 96), perspectives, however, is the fact that there remains a healthy debate as to just how reductive analyses of media’s materiality need to be. Sterne (2014) argues that no solid agreement has yet been achieved as to the ways in which scholars talk about and operationalise “the various relationships among the things that constitute our



thoroughly technical *and* human realm: physical and social processes, consciousness and subjectivity, power and justice” [emphasis in the original].

Thus, any account of contemporary media power must approach the materiality of media from a nuanced perspective which can adequately incorporate not only a hybridity of media actor, but also a hybridity of cultural/symbolic and material components and dynamics. Recognising these theoretical inter-relationships should enable the development and adoption of a robust conceptual approach to contemporary media power allowing for the development of an analytical model and empirical analysis able to adequately identify and account for the deeper socio-cultural, socio-technical and material considerations within networked media environments.

## **Conclusions**

Drawing on a diverse range of literature covering the development of contemporary conceptualisations of media power, this chapter reveals that the trajectory of power over the past half-century has moved away from observable, agent-centric behaviour linked causally to formal political outcomes, through a phase of dispersal into society’s wider political, economic and cultural structures and institutions of society before finally becoming dissolved into the social fabric where it is constituted as a network of material processes and immaterial forces operating both to produce and restrict agency at macro- and micro-levels.

This evolution, originating with Dahl’s account of power as a rational, positivist force applied through democratic decision-making (Dahl, 1957, 1958 & 1961), is quickly augmented by the more problematic notion of power hidden in unseen non-decisions (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962 & 1963) or a Marxist false consciousness and located in culturally produced forms of social meaning (Adorno, 1973; Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1973; Lukes, 1974). Such socially constructed forms of power, initially typified by discourse or *dispositif* (Foucault, 1977; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) in turn give way to theories whereby power becomes diffused within every-day society. In such approaches both individual agency as well as socially structuring forces are called into play – either in a dialectically bound relationship (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1984) or as more symmetrical and complex emergent actor-networks constituted by both representational and material elements (Callon, 1986; Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Latour, 2005).

Building on this review of the evolution of power in society the chapter aimed to address the thesis' first research question by assessing how media power concords with such political, sociological and philosophical developments in order to map out the potential 'shape' of what a contemporary theory of media power might encompass.

In broad terms, the development of media power evolves along a liberal pluralist-critical axis as per the other forms of social power. Media power in part provides access to a plurality of information enabling accurate and rational decision-making in democratic contexts and acts as a public watchdog against abuses of political power (Curran, 2002; Dahlgren & Gurevitch, 2005). This democratic potential, however, is similarly critiqued through concerns that the media is also influenced by a political economic drive to limit media production to entertainment and frivolous 'soft news' which severely curtails its democratic potential and limits opportunities for social change (Herman & Chomsky, 1994; McNair, 2000; Murdock & Golding, 2005). Moreover, such approaches situate media production within a much larger constellation of professional media actors (Blumler, 1990; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Davis, 2002; Esser, Reinemann, & Fan, 2001) and "cultural intermediaries" (Maguire & Matthews, 2010; Mwaura, 2013).

Such approaches to media power persist into the contemporary digitally-networked age with optimistic, liberal scholarship arguing that the internet empowers individuals and collectives to "challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalised in society" (Castells, 2007: 248). Conversely, critical scholars argue that newer forms of networked media merely extend opportunities for entertainment content driven by commercial, not socially transformational, interests (Hargittai, 2006; Hindman, 2008; Papacharissi, 2010).

From this synthesis and analysis of literature covering theories of media and power it has become clear that while studies of media power have adapted effectively to liberal democratic; political economic and critical cultural traditions of power it would seem that unpacking, aligning and applying the range of increasingly networked and materialist theories of power to media has proved more elusive. As the literature demonstrates, one explanation for this may be due to the theoretical heritage of the "elite-mass media-audience" paradigm (Davis, 2007) which has

ensured that research into media power has remained focused on macro-level, institutional sites of power and their associated actors, interchanged depending on scholars' theoretical approach, e.g. liberal, Marxist, cultural. Similarly, Gillespie, Boczkowski & Foot (2014) have noted that “[m]ore often than not” media power scholarship has “borrowed conceptual and theoretical lenses developed in earlier studies of traditional print and broadcast media” (Gillespie, Boczkowski & Foot, 2014: 2). This scenario, however, suggests a urgent need to revise and update approaches to media power in order to bring it in line with the effects being generated by the emergence of the internet and the increasingly networked media and communications it instantiates.

In concluding this chapter, and addressing the thesis' first research question, the operational contexts, constituent parts and motivating forces of contemporary media power can be mapped as follows: Firstly, the context of contemporary media power has shifted from a formal, institutionally dominated media landscape to a hybridised, polycentric one where the ability to produce, distribute and consume media – and thus the potential to exert media power – has become diffused across the social realm.

Secondly, the hybridity of contemporary media power requires a recognition that any theory of media power in the above context must take into account the shift from a “mass media” to “networked media” logic. This is typified as a coming together of two constituent parts. These are the institutionally-coordinated formal media actors, typically producing informational content according to rigid news values and designed to appeal to mass audiences, becoming blended with more fluid, networks of informal media actors producing media content largely selected according to personal (or wider group) interests (Curran, 2003; Benkler, 2006: 176-180; Castells, 2009).

Thirdly, with this diffusion of media production among informal media actors across the social domain, contemporary media power has a greater potential to be increasingly motivated by social or cultural drivers than the commercially-oriented or liberal-democratic public interest discourses of institutional media (Benkler, 2006). Moreover, given the change in inter-connectedness and personal commitment of networked media production, contemporary media power is more likely to produce, distribute and consume information at greater speed, efficiency and scale

than the bureaucratic or corporate models and logics of institutional media (Klinger and Svensson, 2014).

Finally, as identified in this chapter, one of the main conceptual divergences between political, sociological and philosophical theories of power and media power is the increased importance of materialism in the ways power is formed and exerted (Callon, 1986; Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Latour, 2005). Thus, it is clear that a contemporary model of media power must take into account the material qualities at work within the current media landscape, particularly the materiality of media technology underpinning the digitally-networked media platforms being adopted by formal and informal actors alike (Beer, 2009; Packer, 2013; Bollmer, 2015).

Taking this account of contemporary media power as its starting point, the thesis will now move on to address the second research question in the thesis: can an analytical model be developed that will allow researchers to effectively identify and analyse this form of contemporary media power?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Context: Ontology and Analytical Model**

Having articulated a revised account of contemporary media power in *Chapter 2*, this chapter will now address the second research question posed by this thesis: *can an analytical model be developed allowing researchers to effectively identify and analyse contemporary media power*. In order to achieve this, this chapter will firstly outline the underlying ontological perspective on which the analytical model will be developed. This is significant as, due to the interpolation of neo-materialist approaches into the revised theoretical account of media power, a philosophical approach is required that will underpin the empirical analysis in a way that facilitates the research to recognise and analyse the materiality of media power as well as its phenomenological, symbolic aspects (Coole and Frost, 2010).

Secondly, the chapter will establish an analytical model for the subsequent empirical analysis. This will be achieved by outlining and defining the *who, what, how* and *why* of contemporary media power according to the theoretical perspective developed in *Chapter 2*. Having provided clarity around these analytical variables, the chapter will conclude with the creation of four central analytical pillars: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding, around which the core empirical analysis will be built in subsequent chapters.

### **Ontologies of difference and multiplicity: limits of classical ontology**

As identified in the previous chapter, the theoretical horizon of contemporary media power arguably requires extending from a hitherto dichotomous conceptual landscape based on individual or structural agency and operating in – and studied from – a purely phenomenological perspective to a neo-materialist one in which agency becomes located within complex networks of formal and informal actors constituted and shaped by networks of symbolic and material components and dynamics. In order to build an analytical model appropriate for this revised theoretical context it is important to first discuss the ontological status on which research in this neo-materialist environment is planned and conducted.

Such a task begins with Chadwick's (2007; 2011a; 2011b; 2017) account of the hybrid media space discussed in *Chapter 2*. Drawing on the etymological origins of hybridity Chadwick argues that such a concept plays a pivotal role in understanding the contemporary networked media environment as it challenges and "unsettles" conventional interpretations of society by providing

a powerful way of [...] seeing the world that highlights complexity, interdependence, and transition ... [and] that captures heterogeneity and things that are irreducible to simple, unified essences (Chadwick, 2011: 3)

Thus, at an ontological level, hybridity potentially provides a useful way to reject and undermine the dichotomous accounts of reality rooted in institutional-structural and agent-centric approaches prevalent in the extant media power literature. It can be argued, too, that hybridity not only rejects such approaches but also sets out and seeks to move towards an account of society premised on a relational interdependence between heterogenous components.

While such an ontological perspective facilitates a move beyond the largely stable and well delineated conceptual identities on which earlier studies of media power are based, Chadwick's version of hybridity is potentially problematised owing to its overt reliance on a traditional ontological framework. For example, on the one hand it can be argued that hybridity's 'betweenness' can be understood as a term accounting for a world beyond essentialism, yet hybridity's betweenness is actually a *process* that blurs boundaries between existent, stable identities and essences. That is, the hybridisation of fixed concepts is only made possible by an ontological position that accedes - *a priori* – the identification, presence and existence of the original, pre-hybridised essences.

A further challenge to hybridity is its situation within a classical ontological framework. From this position ontologies make "assertions or assumptions about the nature of being and reality" and which are often constituted through "hierarchical relations ... assigned [through] prior existence, higher modality, or some other privileged status" (Chandler & Munday, 2011 cited in Chadwick, 2011: note 1). Thus, while hybridity draws attention to the role of complexity it may not go far enough in enabling a rigorous conceptualisation and operationalisation of that complexity.

A more radical view of ontological hybridity is found in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 1994) and his collaboration with Felix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Emerging out of a post-structuralist philosophical milieu characterised by the rejection of traditional ontologies, Deleuze (1994) reconstructs this rejection of conceptual stability by proposing an ontology created from the fluid and perpetually-open possibilities of reality, rather than its discovery within a

defined, singular ontology (May, 2005: 1-26). In place of an ontological project seeking to discover reality through the mapping and investigation of fixed identities, Deleuze proposes an ontology that emerges, and is created out of, a world “the very ground of which is difference, in which everything rests upon disparities, upon differences of differences which reverberate to infinity” (Deleuze, 1994: 241).

Conceived as such, an ontology of difference becomes differentiated from hybridity’s classical ontology. We can demonstrate this distinction by returning to hybridity’s betweenness and applying a comparative evaluation. Whereas in an ontology of hybridity betweenness can be understood as a transitional – or interstitial - position between stable concepts, in an ontology of difference betweenness:

does not designate a localisable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other way, a stream without beginning or end (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 13)

Thus, where an ontology of hybridity seeks to account for an instability in the established order by blurring fixed boundaries, an ontology of difference exists solely as a permanently unsettled, unstable and emergent difference within which identities are produced through dynamic processes that are continually stabilised and destabilised.

Such an ontology presents a challenge in that if such an ontological approach arguably resists the creation of a stable, “coherent framework” (May, 2005: 19) how can it be adopted into an analytical model for the investigation of media power? The following section will attempt to demonstrate how an ontology of differences can be translated into a working analytical model.

Helpfully, in their work on difference and multiplicity Deleuze and Guattari developed conceptual structures to illustrate instantiations of their ontology. One of these Deleuzian structures is the concept of the Rhizome. Rhizomes, Deleuze and Guattari assert, are networks of root systems (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3-25) constituting “a series of productive connections with no centre or foundation” (Colebrook, 2002: 156). Thus, it can be argued that a Rhizome provides the conceptual ‘scaffolding’ of a networked structure crucially acting as the basis for the



creation of an analytical model consistent with the underlying ontology of difference in which contemporary media power plays out.

The challenge remains, however, as to how this ontological concept of the Rhizome can be operationalised as an analytical model to investigate media power in the empirical analysis section of this thesis. This will be achieved by adopting and adapting a further Deleuzian concept, the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze & Parnet, 2002) and, more pertinently, assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006a).

### **Assemblages: From Deleuze to DeLanda**

The concept of the assemblage emerges inconsistently throughout Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986; 1987; 1994; Deleuze & Parnet, 2002) owing to the fact that the authors employed a "terminological exuberance" of metaphors in their work to account for diverse, yet related, processes or concepts (DeLanda, 2002: 157). It is generally accepted, however, that there is a conceptual inter-operability between the rhizome and assemblage and in at least one instance the rhizome is adopted synonymously with the assemblage (Grossberg, 1992: 57). Thus rhizomes are *one way* of articulating the concept of the assemblage (Wiley, 2005: 92 note 26).

At a fundamental level, assemblages are dynamic processes of organisation and crucially also *disorganisation* that give shape to the singularities, that is, components of reality, that emerge from the ontology of difference (Wiley, 2005: 71).

Assemblages are not static units but rather processes of selection and organisation/disorganisation that give consistency to the components constituting an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 406; Wise, 2005: 77).

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish two types of assemblages operating symbiotically with each other. These assemblages are constituted by material and semiotic forces (content and expression in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology) and conceptualised as machinic assemblages and collective assemblages of enunciation respectively.

These two types of assemblage account for one of the two axes along which assemblages operate, the other axis enabling the forces of stratification or flight (or territorialisation and deterritorialisation) - which drive the processes of organisation and disorganisation respectively (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 88). Taken as a

combinatory concept, then, the machinic assemblages of material content and collective assemblages of enunciation of semiotic and incorporeal elements and the territorialising and deterritorialising forces operate through a “double articulation” (Wiley, 2005: 71) to create “concrete assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 67).

While it is possible to locate and articulate key criteria of assemblages within Deleuze and Guattari’s work, it can be argued that their fleeting and diffuse presence limits the potential of such a concept to offer an operational analytical model. DeLanda (2006) has “reformulated” (Shaviro, 2007) Deleuze and Guattari’s work on assemblages into a distinct approach using his own technical and theoretical resources and vocabulary. As a result, DeLanda has “eliminate[d] the need to engage in Deleuzian hermeneutics” and arguably succeeded in outlining a comprehensible framework to account for the fluid and dynamic “processes of assembly” that constitute reality (DeLanda, 2006: 3-4). DeLanda’s assemblage theory takes criteria characterising the form and function of Deleuzian assemblages and codifies them into a cohesive framework.

Although a relatively recent addition to sociology, assemblage theory has already been adopted as powerful and productive ways to account for and analyse phenomena across a range of academic fields (Marcus & Saka, 2006: 102). Evidence of such adoption can be found in research spanning critical and cultural theory (Phillips, 2006; Venn, 2006; Wiley, 2005); political geography (Dewsbury, 2011; Legg, 2011), political communications (Chadwick, 2011; Kreiss, 2009; Nielsen, 2009; Wiley, Becerra, & Sutko, 2012) as well as social movement studies (Chesters & Welsh, 2006; McFarlane, 2009). While there is evidence of emerging adoption within communication studies, the application of assemblages rests primarily at the level of generic appropriation. As such, there remains significant potential for a more rigorous derivation from Deleuze and Guattari’s work and an operationalisation of assemblages to derive a robust analytical model for investigating media power in a digitally-networked environment.

Assemblage theory adapts and simplifies Deleuze and Guattari’s machinic assemblages and assemblages of enunciation by refining them into a single conceptual model, expressed along two axes of material-expression and territorialisation-deterritorialisation (DeLanda, 2006: 12-15). This means that an assemblage is constituted through component parts that are both material as well as symbolic. These components are organised through processes of territorialisation and

deterritorialisation, described by DeLanda as processes “that either stabilise the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or [...] or destabilise it” (*ibid.*).

These processes stabilise the identity of an assemblage by increasing its internal homogeneity or increasing the clarity of its boundaries or destabilise it by undermining territorialising processes respectively. It’s important to note that because assemblage theory functions according to the exercise of components’ capacities, as opposed to the aggregation of their properties, then component parts may exist as a mixture of material and expressive roles and operate as territorialising and deterritorialising forces at any one time (*ibid.*: 12-14).

While assemblages are constituted along two axes through a complex “organisational dynamics” (Wiley, 2005: 71) there is a further operational element within the assembly process that ultimately gives assemblages a nominal structure: universal singularities. Although assemblage theory posits that while the interaction and exercise of components’ capacities means their construction is always non-linear and emergent, “the set of possible capacities of an assemblage is not amorphous however open-ended it may be, since different assemblages exhibit different sets of capacities”. That is, while assemblages emerge from the capacity of their component parts to evolve through processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, they are ultimately bounded by a topological structure or, in DeLanda’s terms, a “space of possibilities” (DeLanda, 2006: 29).

This structure is, in turn, conceived as an ontological space<sup>11</sup> constituted by ‘singularities’ - irreducible elements representing the full range of possible permutations or variations an assemblage may take. Put another way, such spaces can be understood as providing the “degrees of freedom” (*ibid.*) within which singularities may be brought to life to create a given assemblage.

DeLanda then introduces the concept of ‘universal singularities’- alternatively attractors<sup>12</sup> - that are recurring features accounting for, in part, the patterns of

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<sup>11</sup> In Deleuzian terms, the ‘space of possibilities’ is a ‘virtual’ space synonymous with what I have termed an ‘ontology of differences or multiplicities’ and described variously as a ‘world of intensity’; a ‘plane of consistency’; a ‘machinic phylum’; an ‘intensive spatium’ (DeLanda 2002, 158)

<sup>12</sup> Although DeLanda adopts the term ‘attractors’ in Assemblage Theory, a more detailed account is outlined in his earlier work, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002) owing to the scientific origins of the term. Here DeLanda addresses two primary forms of attractors that define distribution of singularities in assemblages, ‘steady-state’ and ‘limit-cycle’, that tend towards a final state and a state of oscillation respectively (2002, 15).

distribution of individual singularities across spaces of possibility. Citing examples from physics,<sup>13</sup> DeLanda suggests that, despite their existence within a space of possibilities, many mechanical systems are ultimately constrained by outcomes that seek to minimise the difference between potential and kinetic energy. Thus, universal singularities can be understood as generating “inherent or intrinsic *long-term tendencies* of a system, the states which the system will spontaneously tend to adopt in the long run.” (DeLanda, 2002: 15) [emphasis in original]. This means that while an assemblage is theoretically open to indeterminate transformation, universal singularities act to constrain and determine the formation of an assemblage in a particular and enduring pattern over time. DeLanda refers to this as a “coded assemblage”; defined as an assemblage which becomes so consistent that it gains a “*superficial identity*” beyond its constituent parts (DeLanda 2006: 14-16) [my emphasis].

Recognising this phenomenon enables universal singularities to be understood as playing a vital role in the empirical analysis of media power intended in this thesis by providing a way to identify and analyse its effects. Specifically, universal singularities offer a way for an empirical analysis to account for the ways in which the complex and hybrid processes of (de)territorialisation likely to be exhibited by the informal and formal media actors coalesce into a symbolic-material assemblage which presents a stable, consistent and “superficial identity” (*ibid.*) beyond the sum of its parts. In turn this identity becomes the defining interpretation of events within the assemblage visible to a wider public. Such a notion is fully aligned with the definition of media power adopted in this thesis (Couldry, 2001; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Freedman, 2014).

In order to operationalise such a phenomenon in the empirical analysis, however, it is first necessary to discuss and interpolate a well-established - and increasingly important (Bryant & Miron, 2004) – theoretical and analytical approach used in media and communications research: framing.

### **Framing theory: origins and definitions**

Emerging from the fields of sociology and psychology, framing theory has, according to (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009; Reese, 2001), been broadly adopted and applied at either macro-social (Edelman, 1964; Gitlin, 1980; D. A. Scheufele &

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<sup>13</sup> The identification and interpretation of universal singularities is at present most fully developed in the natural sciences where methods exist for more in-depth analysis of such phenomena. See DeLanda, 2002.

Tewksbury, 2007; Shoemaker & Reese, 2012; Tuchman, 1978) or micro-cognitive scales (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, 1984; Sherif, 1967). This macro-micro paradigm has given rise to a research agenda largely dominated by studies of media effects examining elite-mass media-audience interactions (Davis, 2007: 2-3) and thematic approaches looking at frames through critical; cultural; and cognitive lenses (see Goffman 1974; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Neuman, Just et al. 1992; Wicks 2005; Gorp 2007; Gorp 2010 for a selection of such perspectives). Additionally, framing has been integrated into related fields such as social movement studies (Benford, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986) and agenda-setting and priming (Chong & Druckman, 2010; Maher, 2001; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; D. A. Scheufele, 2000; D. A. Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007).<sup>14</sup>

Most significantly, for this thesis' purposes, framing provides a conceptual and empirical approach to analyse the function of contemporary media power. Framing represents a rich research space to examine the relationships between media and political or social power (Carragee & Roefs, 2004: 227) by providing an insight into the ways "relationships and institutional arrangements support routine and persistent ways of making sense of the social world" (Reese, 2001: 19). According to Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) media power, ultimately, is a "struggle over framing" (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993: 117).

Importantly for the empirical approach being developed here, Carragee and Roefs (2004) assert that framing analysis must be conducted in a way that takes into account the wider context in which frames are produced rejecting approaches that place too much emphasis on media effects or the mechanistic function of media actors in shaping frames. This enables the researcher to capture and understand the media's potential to exert definitional power in society by naturalising certain elements of reality. By broadening the focus of framing to include the full range of symbolic and material resources and processes this approach to framing is entirely consistent with the analytical opportunities presented by assemblage theory outlined above.

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<sup>14</sup> An entire thesis could be written about the diverse origins, emergence and future trajectory of framing theories and research. For a comprehensive history of framing see Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) and for a wide-ranging engagement with the conceptual and theoretical field of framing research see Scheufele (2004).

Despite this useful direction in media framing, the diversity of the field has led to an increasingly “casual” adoption of the theory (Entman 1993: 2) applied primarily as a “practical heuristic used to understand a range of topics” (Druckman, 2010: xiv) and as little more than a “hook” for any number of diverse research approaches (Reese, 2007: 151). As a response, framing scholars tried to resolve framing’s lack of theoretical clarity by undertaking a series of self-reflexive exercises to pin-down and (re)define the concept (Tewksbury, 2011). Somewhat problematically, the development of these meta-theories, notably Entman’s Framing Paradigm (1993), Scheufele’s *Theory of Media Effects* (1999) and D’Angelo’s multi-paradigmatic approach (2002), have not only perpetuated macro-micro interpretations of framing but, moreover, have helped cement this reductionism as a central pillar of framing’s over-arching research agenda.

These increasingly diverse and reductionist approaches, arguably, demonstrate framing’s past legacy of re-evaluation and thus opens the way for its further reconfiguration with assemblage theory. In order to achieve this, Reese’s interpretation of framing theory as a “bridging project” (2007) will be adopted as a key conceptual approach. In contrast to Entman’s drive to build a cohesive theoretical paradigm for framing, Reese argues that

[f]raming’s value [...] does not hinge on its potential as a unified research domain but [...] as a provocative model that bridges parts of the field [of study] that need to be in touch with each other (Reese, 2007: 148)

Interpreted as such, framing theory becomes, as D’Angelo asserts (2002), a research program rather than a unified paradigm; imbued with a “theoretical diversity” that is “beneficial in developing a comprehensive understanding of the process” (Reese, 2007: 148).

Rejecting what he sees as the “tendency for frame reductionism” (*ibid.*: 149) in most dominant accounts of framing, Reese draws on a range of earlier conceptual engagements with framing theory to refocus on more open-ended accounts of the field. This results in an understanding of frames as “a central organising idea” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991) and “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organise

discourse” (Gitlin, 1980: 7).

Bringing together these and other definitions (Hall, 1982; Iyengar, 1991; Morley, 1976), Reese sets out his own working definition of frames as “organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001: 11). Adopting Reese’s definition enables us to approach frames and framing as dynamic processes that organise a set of abstract principles. This is opposed to news-text or media content approaches dominating earlier definitional theories (D’Angelo, 2002; Entman, 1993; D. Scheufele, 1999) and moves frames away from specific mediated locations or one-off interpretations of the media production process and towards “moment[s] in the chain of signification” that designate any number of moments that shape social reality (Reese, 2001: 15). Significantly, Reese’s definition also enables frame organisation to occur across macro- and micro-levels through “symbolic forms of expression” (*ibid.*: 16).

This reappraisal of media and communication processes marks a significant departure from earlier unified theories as Reese overtly contrasts the symbolic interpretation of frames shared across multiple cognitive, constructionist and critical paradigms against Entman’s paradigmatic approach which interprets frames and meaning as located statically in news stories or media content and as transferred through a communicating text between sender and receiver (Entman, 1993: 51-52).

Ultimately, framing on Reese’s terms creates routinised, and thus durable, patterns or structures that persist until contested and transformed by other organising principles (Reese, 2001: 16-18). In keeping with Reese’s multi-level approach these structuring patterns could exist at the content level of media discourse or at an organisational level, such as media production. Based on this reading, it can be argued that Reese’s interpretation opens up framing to be *bridged* with the broader framework of assemblage theory.

### **Bridging Framing and Assemblage Theory**

While assemblages enable society to be conceptualised as a rhizomatically networked structure, framing’s dominant interpretation of the social realm has conventionally been as a linear process where the construction of meaning occurs through the interaction of discrete symbolic units transmitted along clearly delineated

lines of information flow (D'Angelo, 2002; Entman, 1993; D. Scheufele, 1999). Reese (2007) has attempted to revise this perspective by suggesting that framing is a network-oriented processes that “capture[s] more of the ‘network society’ (Castells, 2000) paradigm than [framing theory’s] traditional sender–receiver, message-effects model.” (Reese, 2007: 149).

Although this approach brings framing closer to a conceptualisation based on the underlying networked structure of reality, as per DeLanda’s rhizomatic assemblages, Reese’s approach is still arguably limited by his adoption of Castells’ engagement with networks. In this interpretation – based on telecommunication networks - information is transferred through networks without transformation (Latour, 1999) whereas conversely rhizomatic networks are constituted through transformative “productive connections” (Colebrook, 2002: 156). Nevertheless, it is significant that Reese’s definition of framing seeks to distinguish it as a non-linear, network-oriented process over hitherto dominant interpretations of framing as a linear process.

This centrality of relational, networked connections within framing processes has parallels in DeLanda’s assemblage theory, which instantiates relationships through a “relational exteriority” (DeLanda, 2006: 10-11) which connects component parts within assemblages. The result is that assemblage parts are not defined by their fundamental essence and role within a static concept linked by cohesive relations of interiority. Rather, parts are connected to - and function within - multiple assemblages at the same time and have relations based on each part’s capacity.

Such a phenomenon is also visible in Reese’s interpretation of framing as “chains of signification” (Reese, 2001: 15) that create “structures of meaning made up of a number of concepts and the relations among those concepts” (Hertog & McLeod, 2001: 140). Using assemblage theory to formalise our understanding of the nature of relationships in framing, we can propose that frames are constructed not as an aggregation of their parts with unique properties, but rather as the dynamic assembling of parts exercising emergent capacities.

Having determined the shared centrality of relations within both framing and assemblage theory the next aspect of framing theory that requires reconfiguring is the notion of frames as constituted through purely communicative principles. In Reese’s definition framing is a symbolic process composed of signifying elements (Reese,



2001: 15). This definitional claim draws on broader framing literature which reveals similar characteristics whereby frames are constituted by “media texts ... visual and verbal features” and “syntactical, script, thematic and rhetorical” structures (*ibid.*: 16) - primarily as a result of framing’s antecedents in media effects research and the phenomenology of social constructivism (D'Angelo, 2002; Entman, 1993; Reese, 2010; Scheufele, 1999).

Given the recent turn to the materiality of media and communications, however, (Adams, 2009; Terranova, 2004; Packer & Wiley, 2012; Packer, 2013; Bollmer, 2015) it can be argued that assemblage theory provides a powerful bridge between framing’s traditional social constructivism and the materiality of media. As already identified, DeLanda (2006) articulates assemblages as operating within two dimensions constituted as material-expressive and territorialising-deterritorialising forces. Applied to framing theory, the first axis enables us to account for the way in which frames can be constituted by both material as well as symbolic components.

The second axis also plays a crucial role in bridging assemblage theory with framing. As per Reese’s definition framing is an organising process that constructs and structures shared meaning: “frames must always be considered in the process of gaining or losing organising value” (Reese, 2001: 15). For DeLanda, assemblages are determined by territorialising-deterritorialising forces that continually effect their material and expressive properties to stabilise the identity - and thus, meaning - of assemblages by increasing or decreasing internal homogeneity or increasing or decreasing the clarity of its boundaries respectively (DeLanda, 2006: 15).

Finally, by combining these overlapping features of both theories with the phenomena of ‘universal singularities’ and ‘coding’ already discussed above it can be argued that when a symbolic-material media assemblage gains such a consistent pattern and superficial identity it effectively ‘frames’ a particular issue or event and thus can be understood as representing, from an empirical point of view, the tangible and observable effects of media power.

### **Establishing an Analytical Model of Contemporary Media Power**

To move closer towards an empirical analysis of contemporary media power, it is necessary to develop and operationalise an analytical model. The following section will set out the analytical model by providing clarity on the *key components* or

*variables* present in the revised theoretical perspective on media power established in *Chapter 2*. It will conclude by defining four central analytical pillars for use in the empirical analysis.

According to Hagen (1961) “[a]n analytical model is a mental construct consisting of a set of elements in interrelation, the elements and their interrelations being precisely defined.” (Hagen, 1961: 144). Building such a model, Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) argue, requires the researcher to consider:

- the actors and objects present in the theoretical framework
- their properties (and any significant variation between different them)
- the relationships and interactions between them
- conditions of interaction
- the effects or outcomes of such interactions

(Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014: 20)

Based on these criteria the following section will develop an analytical model for use in the empirical analysis undertaken in this thesis by taking the theoretical perspective of contemporary media power established in *Chapter 2* and creating a model which can be operationalised to conduct the thesis’ empirical analyses.

Addressing these criteria one-at-a-time will enable the researcher to map out the empirical “the territory being investigated” (*ibid.*) in the thesis by defining and discussing the: *who*, *what*, *how* and *why* of contemporary media power. Doing so will also allow for reflection on any complexities or limitations likely to be encountered in the analysis.

The ‘*Who*’

Based on the definition of media power adopted in this thesis the actors involved in the organisation and structuring of information to confer meaning on specific interpretations of events or facts represent an important element of analysis. In keeping with the socially-networked nature of contemporary media outlined above, both individual and collective actors included in the analytical model operate within either a formal or informal context. These terms are defined below. Firstly, formal media actors can be understood as the individuals and institutions that are engaged in producing and distributing information through “old” or “mainstream” media channels, such as television, newspapers and radio (Chadwick, 2011a).

At an individual level this includes the journalists, editors and media owners responsible for the selection and organisation of information used to shape meaning. However, given the professionalisation of the media over the past decades (Franklin, 2004), the term also includes other individuals involved in influencing the availability of information and allocation of resources necessary to structure meaning, such as communications managers, media consultants and policy advisors (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 15-17; Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Scammell, 1995).

Although these individuals and institutions have increasingly adapted to the opportunities and challenges presented by the digital media environment they continue to function according to a formalised set of agreed or expected professional standards, often established by informal standards, such as public interest or more formal frameworks, such as associational Codes of Practice or self-regulation (NUJ, 2011; Ruth, n.d.).

By contrast, informal media actors can be understood as the digitally-networked individuals and collective groups that are enabled to achieve “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2009: 56) through digital media platforms. At an individual level, an informal media actor can refer to a citizen journalist (Breindl, 2016) someone who devotes their personal time to gathering, interpreting and publishing information online, often with little professional experience or commercial support.

The term can also refer to the digitally-networked collectives of individuals who co-ordinate the sourcing, analysis, production and distribution of information – as well as organising social action as part of production of meaning (Allen, 2016). These digitally-enabled collectives can be constituted by social movements already in existence, such as NGOs, protest or activist groups or political parties. The ease and speed of using digital media to organise, however, has meant that such networked groups can emerge rapidly around a topical issue, co-ordinate information-sharing or action and then disband (*ibid.*).

The ‘*What*’

Having defined the media actors operating as the subjects of analysis in this thesis, it is also necessary to define the objects of analysis. That is, in addition to investigating

the *who* of media power - which actors are responsible for sourcing and structuring information in order to shape and define meaning - it is also necessary to investigate the *what* of media power, i.e. what are the inputs used by media actors in order to shape and create meaning.

It is important here to consider the implications of the theoretical perspective of contemporary media power set out in *Chapter 2*, as well as the ontological context provided by hybridity and assemblage theory above. Both of these accounts require the inclusion of material and symbolic elements in the definition of contemporary media power adopted in this thesis, therefore any empirical analysis of such a phenomenon must also take account of both domains.

When thinking about the '*what*' of the empirical analysis, however, addressing the material and symbolic qualities of media has not always been straightforward.

Damásio, Henrique, Da Silva *et al* (2015) have identified a

“[t]ension between content and materiality [which] has often prevented media scholars from fully acknowledging the role played by artifacts in the communication process, and has created a gap in research between the consumption/content side and the material side of communication technologies (*ibid.*: 387)

Attempting to bridge this analytical gap between the foundational or technologically determinist approaches of the German and Canadian media studies traditions, typified by Kittler, McLuhan and Innis (Bollmer, 2015: 96) and the symbolically-led paradigms dominated by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and the British Cultural Studies movement, Damásio, Henrique, Da Silva *et al* (2015) propose refocusing analytical attention on the 'artifacts' or 'objects' found within the communication process.

Building on this perspective, in this thesis the communicative artifacts being produced, shared and consumed by the actors in the case studies will be defined as 'media objects' (Damásio, Henriques, Da Silva *et al.*, 2015; van den Boomen and Lehmann, n.d.). Crucially, in keeping with the thesis' definition of media power, media objects will be understood as incorporating both the material as well as

symbolic qualities of media, thus allowing researchers to “grasp the heterogeneous implications of digital culture” (van den Boomen and Lehmann, n.d.: 8).

Drawing on van den Boomen and Lehmann’s account of media object analysis (*ibid.*) examples identified and analysed in the thesis include:

- Computer software (e.g. Facebook’s newsfeed algorithm, Google’s PageRank algorithm, spam filtering algorithms)
- Hyperlinks
- Hashtags
- Symbolic content (e.g. images, films, audio files, social media posts, news articles and broadcasts, corporate statements, interpersonal discussions)
- Bodies
- Placards and banners

In addition to the technological materiality and symbolic qualities of media objects outlined above, the analytical model adopted in the thesis will also include physical space and place within the concept of media objects. This decision has been made due to the increasing significance of location within media production and consumption and the increasing importance the physical environment plays in shaping – and being shaped by – media outputs (Evans, 2015; Frith, 2015; Wilken & Goggin, 2014).

As Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) have argued, “place”, defined as the physical environment of a particular location is constituted by “a combination of material and symbolic qualities” that are at any one time operating in “a fluid tension” (Endres and Cook, 2011: 259; 262). As a result, place can function as both a material media object in which a media actor is embedded, inter-relates with and which informs their actions, thus influencing meaning creation. Alternatively, it can function as a purely symbolic media object, in that the production and distribution of an image of place can influence and shape meaning through the ways it is received and interpreted by different actors. A further, final yet highly important consideration that needs to be made here is that it is entirely possible that a media object may be constituted by, and operate across, the material and symbolic distinction outlined above.

The above example of how place can function as a media object displaying a fluid tension between the material and symbolic domains is a useful reminder of the potential complexity and challenges faced in delineating and tracing the blurred lines

between such concepts. Moreover, it's not just place that exerts such fluid qualities: hashtags, for example, can function symbolically in that they convey a particular communicative message or express solidarity towards (or against) a particular topic. However, they can also function materially by automatically linking a person from a single social media post featuring the hashtag to an aggregated collection of related (i.e. similarly tagged) content. From an analytical point of view, however, there remains a need to provide clarity and consistency in the empirical analysis undertaken in the thesis.

To ensure robust and rigorous empirical investigation is achieved, a clear distinction between material and symbolic media objects will be adopted in the analytical model and any such 'fluid tensions' encountered among media objects in the empirical analysis will be addressed and reflected on as pragmatically as possible in order to mitigate the potential complexity of disentangling such objects.

One way in which this concern will be addressed is through the anticipated method of analysis applied to media objects. Van Den Boomen and Lehmann, (n.d.: 9) assert that while media objects can be studied in-depth as the primary object of analysis through probing the "history, business model, controversies, design, affordances, and appropriation" they can also be studied as a secondary object of analysis in order to "illustrate how particular phenomena materialise" (*ibid.*). Adopting this type of analysis, Van Den Boomen and Lehmann argue, requires a heuristic approach, which the authors define as using media objects as a practical method for learning that, while not optimal, is sufficient for exploring and investigating phenomena in order to help formulate and develop further hypotheses. Such an approach to media objects will ensure that any material-symbolic fluidity exhibited by a media object will be able to be identified and analysed (*ibid.*).

A further way to address any potential fluidity between the material-symbolic qualities of media objects can also be addressed through the concept of affordances. Affordances are defined as the differing variety of opportunities for interpretation and action, that media objects present to media actors (Demásio, Henriques, da Silva, *et al.*, 2015: 389). These allow for variation in the empirical analysis between the material and/or symbolic qualities of a media object – and, moreover, the different interactions, relationships and arrangements they can generate-dependending on the context in which they are identified and studied.

Having defined the *who* (media actors) and *what* (media objects) of the empirical analysis undertaken in the thesis, the analytical model will further need to account for the *how*, i.e. what are the interactions, arrangements and affordances between media actors and media objects that enable the production of meaning and the creation of media power. Finally, the model will need to address the question of *why* the specific arrangements of media actors and objects emerge or are created in the first place.

#### The ‘How’

Given the complexity and interdependence of media actors and media objects functioning within networked information systems (Chadwick, 2013: 10; Castells, 2001; 2009; Benkler, 2006) and in keeping with Boczkowski and Siles’ call for media scholarship to adopt a research approach connecting the four cardinal points of media production, media consumption, symbolic content and materiality of media in order to overcome limitations of past scholarship in the current networked age (Boczkowski and Siles, 2014: 560-564).

As such the empirical analysis must identify specifically *how* formal and informal media actors interact, *how* the symbolic and material media objects are produced, circulated and consumed, *how* the media technologies facilitating such processes function and *how* the outcomes of such interactions produce and exert media power. To achieve analytical model capable of tracing the interactions between formal and informal media actors; identifying the symbolic and material media objects (and their affordances) being produced, circulated and consumed; identifying and investigating the media technologies facilitating such processes; and, ultimately, seek to account for the outcomes such interactions and processes produce. By adopting such an analytical model the thesis will hopefully take steps towards an “alternative intellectual trajectory[y]” in media research as set out by Boczkowski and Siles (2014: 561).

Siles and Boczkowski (2012) and Boczkowski and Siles (2014) define such networked arrangements of media actors and objects entangled in production/consumption and content/materiality relationships as “texto-material assemblages” (2014: 563) in accordance with the textual nature of online content included in their original study. In the empirical analysis undertaken in this thesis the

term ‘assemblage’ will be adopted but, crucially, amended slightly to reflect the broader “realm of verbal/semiotic signifiers” (Hayles, 2002: 25) generated by the increasingly interpersonal and multi-media nature of contemporary, digitally-networked media (Mirzoeff, 2015). As a result, the term used to define and describe such arrangements of media actors and objects in the thesis will be *symbolic-material media assemblages* - shortened to *media assemblages* where appropriate.

Although Boczkowski and Siles (2014) adopt the notion of an assemblage more generically than DeLanda’s detailed theory (2006) it is important to note that the use of the term *symbolic-material media assemblage* in this thesis aligns more closely with DeLanda’s approach set out above. As such, the aim is for the thesis’ analytical modal to operationalise the specific processes of assemblage theory more directly. For example, in the analytical model being developed, symbolic-material media assemblages are constituted through the interaction of media actors with symbolic and material media objects whose actions either stabilise or destabilise the overall assemblage through the processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation described above (DeLanda, 2006: 12-15).

Adding further clarity to the *how* of the analytical model, it is also useful to define the specific ways in which the above actions and interactions between actors and objects and their contexts and affordances ‘organise’ (i.e. territorialise or deterritorialise) an assemblage. Key questions will need to be asked of the following:

- who (and what) is connected within a particular network of actors and objects (and who/what is excluded);
- what opportunities to produce, share and consume media objects arise through those connections (or exclusions);
- what decisions are made when producing, sharing and consuming media objects among media actors;
- who and what affordances influence those decisions;
- what material actions arise as a result of such decisions;
- what material conditions exist in order to influence or transform those actions;
- what objects are shared, distributed (and which aren’t) and what are the wider implications or effects on this networked arrangement.

Finally, according to assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006) organisation within networks is an emergent process constituted by the interactions outlined above. As



Castells (citing Latour) argues: networked organisation is a function exerted by the “*networks themselves*” [emphasis in original] (Castells, 2009: 45). Clarifying this notion, Gerbaudo (2012), suggests that digital networks are organised to achieve specific outcomes through a “choreographic leadership” (Gerbaudo, 2012: 134-135). That is, while networks reject direct central coordination, a form of coordination is possible through indirect means, such as communal and collective behaviours, expressions of intent or shared meaning.

This, argues Gerbaudo, is a reversal of traditional forms of organisational governance in that “it is communication that organises, rather than [the] organisation that communicates” (Gerbaudo, 2012: 139). Within symbolic-material media assemblages, then, the functions of communication and organisation are inseparable, which suggests that including the analysis of how symbolic-material media assemblages are ‘choreographed’ will be an important empirical concept to be operationalised and investigated through the analytical model.

The ‘*Why*’

One final task for the empirical analysis will be to define the outcomes of such networked interactions – addressing the question where possible of ‘why’ symbolic-material assemblages are created (or, indeed, clarifying if there is an identifiable reason at all underpinning their creation). In order to do so, the analytical model will seek to understand how the specific effects of various arrangements of actors and objects choreograph symbolic-material media assemblages to territorialise and give greater stability and identity to particular interpretations of events and actions in order to define meaning and demonstrate media power. It is possible to understand how this process occurs, how it can be observed and thus analysed by operationalising the concepts of ‘singularities’ and ‘coding’ (DeLanda, 2006: 14-16) and ‘media frames’ (Reese, 2001; 2007; Hertog and McLeod, 2001) discussed above.

Using these terms, media power in the analytical model will be observable through the ways in which the actions and interactions of media actors and media objects operating within symbolic-material media assemblages create a point of *singularity* and effectively *code* the assemblage giving it a consistent and stable identity (DeLanda, 2006: 15). When this happens the multiplicities of potential meaning that are enrolled and choreographed in the media assemblage are “translated” (Callon, 1986) into a clear and singular interpretation of events identifiable in the analysis as

a ‘media frame’. Once this observable effect is discerned, media power can be recognised as having been exerted.

### **Conclusions: Four Analytical Pillars of Contemporary Media Power**

This section of the chapter will build on the variables outlined above to develop an analytical model capable of a robust and consistent empirical investigation of the formal and informal media actors; symbolic and material media objects and the relational constellations exerting media power through the creation of symbolic-material media assemblages. It will set out four analytical pillars - based on a synthesis of the main components or variables discussed above – which will be adopted and operationalised in the subsequent empirical analyses.

#### **i) Hybridity**

The first analytical pillar identified for use in the empirical analysis is hybridity. Recognising the ongoing and fluid interactions between informal, digitally-networked media actors, such as empowered citizens or activist communities, and formal news-makers, such as journalists and media institutions, the emergence of such hybridised media practices and logics already identified in journalism and political science research (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Hermida, 2012; Chadwick, 2013) as well as studies of other emerging media practices, such as collaborative news production or ‘data-mining’ information from digitally-networked flows (Malika & Pfeffera, 2016; Martin, Corney, & Goker, 2015; Vis, 2013; Wall & Zahed, 2015) will help illuminate and provide clarity on the specific, new motivations, priorities and practices of contemporary media production and consumption – and thus the establishment of media power.

#### **ii) Materiality**

The second significant pillar for use in the empirical analysis is materiality – specifically the role played by a range of material objects and infrastructures in shaping the hybridised media repertoires identified above. The materiality of media is perhaps better interpreted through the notion of media *materialities*; that is the diverse array of objects, processes and infrastructures outlined above. Drawing on the ‘media objects’ section in this chapter, the material elements of media assemblages likely to be encountered in the empirical analysis include digital objects and processes, such as computer software, (meta) data, algorithms and hyperlinks, physical spaces and places (Boczkowski, 2010; Newman, 2011; Revers, 2015),

physical artifacts, such as protest placards or leaflets (Evans, 2015; Frith, 2015; Wilken & Goggin, 2014) and the economic materiality of media production, typified by the bias towards commercially-oriented ‘soft news’ (Marsh, Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011; West & Orman, 2002).

### iii) Choreography

The next analytical pillar accounts for the hybridised processes and repertoires of the formal and informal media actors (Chadwick, 2007; 2013) and their embeddedness and inter-relation with the material contexts identified above. In its simplest form, this analytical feature can be understood as a form of network organisation, akin to what Gerbaudo describes as “choreographic leadership” (Gerbaudo, 2012: 134-135) or, alternatively, as protocols or standards governing or directing the emergence and performance of networked media production (Castells, 2009: 56; Chadwick, 2007).

Somewhat paradoxically choreography is not identifiable as a singular phenomenon located specifically within media production and consumption. Rather, this feature is found within the interactions between individual or collective human actors as well as through material components operating within a media assemblage. Castells argues that achieving a coordinating function within such symbolic-material “actor-networks” is exerted by the “*networks themselves*” [emphasis in original] (Castells, 2009: 45).

Gerbaudo (2012) alludes to this when he suggests that choreographic leadership exists when the function of communication and organisation become inseparable. Although networks reject formal and direct centralised coordination, a *form of coordination* is possible through indirect means, such as communal and collective behaviours, expressions of intent or shared meaning. In short: the act of *communicating something* can, in turn, organise networked actors. Thus, being able to identify, trace and understand who and how media assemblages are choreographed is a crucial step in empirically analysing the exertion of media power.

### iv) Coding

The final analytical pillar of the model builds on the above pillars in helping to determine when media power has been achieved through the creation of media assemblages. As discussed earlier in this chapter, when an assemblage develops a point of universal singularity and establishes a consistent or enduring pattern of

behaviour, it becomes heavily territorialised and gains what DeLanda terms a “superficial identity” (DeLanda 2006: 14-16). This identity enables a media frame to be established around the issues and actions constituting the media assemblage. This coded media frame thus determines the way in which the event is interpreted by the public. According to the definition of media power adopted in *Chapter 1*, such an outcome is entirely consistent with the exertion of media power. Thus, when a symbolic-material media assemblage becomes coded and frames an event or issue, the presence of media power becomes tangible and empirically observable.

Taking these core pillars of the analytical model – and the specific variables underpinning the pillars outlined above – into account, and following the theory-model-method process, it is next necessary to set out the appropriate research methods to undertake the empirical analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Methods**

*Chapter 2* of this thesis concluded with a revised theory of contemporary media power based on a review and assessment of social and media power. In *Chapter 3* a model for the analysis of media power was developed in order to address the thesis' third research question: *can the theory of contemporary media power be empirical analysed and validated?* In order to move the thesis closer to an empirical analysis this chapter will establish more specific empirical research questions based on the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3* and set out the research methods required to answer the questions and, ultimately, address the overarching aims of the thesis.

It is first important to recap on the specific empirical research problem or aim that the thesis is seeking to address. According to the research aims in *Chapter 1*, the thesis firstly seeks to answer the question: *what could a revised theory of media power look like given the transformations that have occurred within the media landscape over recent years?* Based on a review of the extant literature on social and media power this question is answered in *Chapter 2* where a revised theory of contemporary media power is outlined. Next the thesis aims to explore and validate the quality and suitability of this theory for future scholarly use. It does this by developing an analytical model (see *Chapter 3*) which allows the theory to be empirically tested.

Taking these statements of the thesis' overall research aims as a starting point, it is important to determine specific empirical research questions to help refine and narrow the research objectives that the thesis will address and therefore improve the likely quality of the research outcomes (Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). By formulating such questions, the researcher should build "interrogative statements" from their original research aims or goals that will enable them to address the specific detail of analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 77). Moreover, such questions will also provide important "signposts" for readers of the thesis readers by setting up and "foreshadowing the specific details of the study" (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006: 478).

What follows are specific research questions for the empirical analysis to answer based on the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3*:

1. are the principle analytical pillars of hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding present in examples of contemporary media use?
2. to what degree are they present in the examples?

3. do the analytical pillars in the examples evolve – i.e. does their presence shift over-time?
4. do these analytical pillars influence the creation of media power?

These questions provide the starting point for the research design and methods required for the thesis' empirical analysis. According to Cresswell (2009) there are three dominant research approaches available to the researcher: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods (Cresswell, 2009: 3). Importantly, however, these approaches should be viewed by the researcher as *less distinct* than they first appear. Rather, qualitative and quantitative approaches should be considered as opposite ends of a research spectrum with mixed-methods sitting in the middle (*ibid*; Newman & Benz, 1998). In selecting the right approach, it is important to consider the role and opportunities that qualitative and quantitative research offer empirical analysis.

In general terms, qualitative research is suited to studies that explore situations, systems or events to gain a better understanding of the meaning that can be applied to them (Cresswell, 2009: 3). This type of research is often conducted to build new theories or augment and adapt existing ones. Typically, it involves the researcher inductively gathering data from within the participants setting, conducting analysis of emerging themes according to their interpretation and recursively testing and developing hypotheses (*ibid.*).

Conversely, quantitative research allows variables specified before the empirical analysis to be measured and analysed using statistical procedures. Quantitative studies test theories deductively and aim to allow their findings to be generalised more widely (*ibid.*). Finally, researchers adopting mixed methods tend to seek an approach that provides a better overall understanding of the research problem in the study. If applied correctly, mixed methods can optimise the mutual strengths of each approach while minimising the mutual weaknesses (Cresswell, 2014: 220).

In this study mixed methods approach will be adopted, although the over-arching research approach to the study will be qualitative. As Cresswell observes, given the spectrum of available approaches a study “*tends to be more qualitative than quantitative or vice versa*” (Cresswell, 2009: 3) [emphasis in original]. Such an approach has been selected in this study because, in order to effectively address the

specific empirical research questions set out above, the research must apply elements of both inductive and deductive research.

Specifically, in order to develop and build the revised theoretical proposition of contemporary media power (see *Chapter 2*) the empirical analysis will need to explore and understand the analytical pillars in the model developed in *Chapter 3* to confirm if such themes are present in the data. In addition to this inductive, exploratory research work, however, a further level of empirical analysis is required to confirm that such themes have played a role in exerting media power, understood in the analytical model as establishing a media frame around a particular event or issue. This requires a deductive approach which can test and validate the outcome or effect of the model (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 16).

A qualitative research approach is suited to addressing the thesis' research questions as it lends itself to using empirical analysis to explore, describe, understand and explain complex phenomena or concepts and test new ideas (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Cresswell, 2014: 20; Newman *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) assert that qualitative research lends itself to questions that “discover ... or describe experiences” and “typically attempt to obtain insights into ... processes and experiences that exist within a specific location and context (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006: 482).

Moreover, Morse (1991) reinforces the relevance of qualitative research to this thesis' aims by asserting that adopting a qualitative research approach is desirable when “a notion that the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased” or “a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory” (Morse, 1991: 120) - again, characteristics identified in the review of extant literature on media power in *Chapter 2*.

In considering adopting a mixed-methods research design it is useful to consider the benefits and limitations of such an approach. While both qualitative and quantitative approaches have strengths and limitations some scholars argue that by mixing and blending the two approaches the strengths of one can be combined with the other while enabling the researcher to overcome inherent limitations present in each. This can result in “a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself” (Cresswell, 2014: 220).



In order to get to these benefits, however, researchers will likely face challenges. Given the methodological flexibility they are likely be faced by the need for extensive, multi-source data collection combined with a period of time-intensive analysis of both sets of data. This dual analysis further adds to the complexity of a mixed methods approach by requiring the researcher to be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative forms of research (*ibid.*: 217). In order to operationalise such a research approach, it is important to reflect on how the empirical study will be designed.

## **Research Design**

In order to select and plan the research and data collection methods for, the following dominant characteristics of qualitative research have been used: researcher as key instrument; natural setting; multiple data sources; inductive and deductive analysis; reflexivity (Creswell, 2014: 185). Creswell asserts that in qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in gathering empirical information for their analysis – *they* are the primary instrument of data collection (*ibid.*). This requires qualitative research to include a detailed discussion on how the researcher’s role could be shaped by their personal background, culture and life experiences. For example, how might these factors influence the interpretation of events or phenomena and therefore the meaning they assign results? As a consequence, robust qualitative analyses benefit from a dedicated section where the researcher writes about their role within the research and reflects on the nature of the likely results (Creswell, 2014: 184). Such a reflection will be provided in greater detail in a dedicated ‘Reflexivity’ section below.

When conducting qualitative research, data collection is primarily undertaken in a setting where research subjects and objects naturally encounter and act on issues relevant to the empirical analysis. Talking to participants, observing their behaviour and its effects in the natural context is an important characteristic of qualitative research. As a result, researchers adopting qualitative research methods need to recognise the potential variety of data sources and therefore, the wide range of methods available for collection and analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014).

Creswell notes that interviews, observations, documents/content analysis are key methods available to qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2014: 185). Importantly, supporting the materialist ontology underpinning this study, Yin (2003) further

suggests the analysis of physical artifacts into the methodological mix (Yin, 2003: 85-96). This in turn allows researchers to inductively explore data to look for themes and then validate or build on those themes through a process of deductive cross-checking (Creswell, 2014: 184-5; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014).

In defining the specific mixed-method research strategy that will be adopted in this thesis it is useful to refer to typologies previously developed for classifying types of mixed-method designs. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) have identified and reviewed several classification systems available to researchers and refined these into a framework of four major mixed method designs:

1. Triangulation Design
2. Exploratory Design
3. Explanatory Design
4. Embedded Design

The 'Embedded' design will be adopted in the thesis for the following reasons. In this design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed separately with the results then combined to look for points of convergence and divergence in order to enhance the overall findings and outcomes of the analysis. Typically, this design has a stronger qualitative or quantitative emphasis, with one type of research used to support the other and enhance the overall results. This makes such a design appropriate to the predominantly qualitative approach adopted in the thesis, but opens up an opportunity to enhance the data collected and, consequently, the outcomes of the analysis (Plano Clark, Huddleston-Casas, Churchill, *et al.*, 2008: 1554-1555).

As noted above, while mixed-methods approaches can strengthen empirical results they necessarily add a level of complexity to the data collection and analysis. With this in mind it is important to acknowledge and address several key concerns with this design. Firstly, both forms of data must be collected using the same variables or constructs in order to enable analytical consistency and reliability (Cresswell, 2014: 219). Secondly, it is important that the researcher aims to ensure that participants in the qualitative sample should also be represented in the quantitative sample in order that the more closely aligned the two data sets are the better any comparison and cross-referencing (*ibid.*). Both of these issues are addressed in the section on data collection methods below.

Thirdly, timing becomes an important consideration in a mixed-methods design, specifically whether the datasets are collected at the same time or sequentially. Within an embedded design it is desirable that data is collected concurrently (*ibid.*: 238). This is something that can be difficult to manage as a single researcher, as opposed to a research team (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). In this study, this issue was addressed through the use of new research technologies which allowed the research to either gather parallel data sources concurrently or to conduct retrospective analysis of data. Such a process presented a number of other issues relating to the use of third-party instrumentation which is discussed in greater detail in the sections on data collection methods below.

A final, but not insignificant, consideration which needs to be addressed when adopting an Embedded design is the inequality between sample sizes of the quantitative and qualitative data. As Cresswell (2014) notes, “the data for the qualitative data collection will be smaller than that for the quantitative data collection” (Cresswell, 2014: 238). In resolving this issue, the empirical analysis adopted in this thesis will not consider unequal sample sizes problematic. Instead, it can be argued that the role of the different types of research are complimentary and used cumulatively, so as a result their analytical roles differ meaning that each requires an internally consistent sample count (*ibid.*).

In approaching the specific design of the empirical research, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) assert that the nature and direction of the research questions under investigation provide direction for the research design (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006: 482). Based on the empirical research questions adopted in the thesis, the first step in order to empirically investigate the phenomena of contemporary media power according to the core pillars of the analytical model will be to locate a series of examples to which the empirical analysis can be applied.

As such, a case study approach will be adopted in order to provide discrete, real-life units of analysis within which the complex phenomena set out in the analytical model (see *Chapter 3*) can be observed, described and explored (Cresswell, 2014; Yin, 2003). In selecting case studies as an appropriate research, the following opportunities and limitations of such as approach have been evaluated. Firstly, as a predominantly qualitative research approach case study analysis is particularly suited to research asking ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions. Indeed, Yin (2003) argues that the more empirical investigation seeks to answer such questions or “require extensive or in-

depth description of some social phenomenon” the more relevant case study analysis becomes (Yin, 2003: 13).

More specifically, the distinct opportunity for case study analysis arises from the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In particular, case studies have been used in prior research to support the investigation and understanding of individual and group behaviours as well as organisational, social and political phenomena (*ibid.*: 4). Not only that, but a further strength of case study research is its ability to analyse and understand real-life phenomena and interactions in greater detail, where such an understanding is embedded in important contextual conditions which are similarly important to the analysis but which may be overlooked or lost in other research approaches (Yin and Davis, 2007).

Thus, it can be argued that analytical opportunities of case study research make it particularly suited to this thesis. In addition, case studies as an analytical *form* are also suited to this thesis’ empirical analysis as they are a preferred way to analyse and understand *contemporary* events (Yin, 2003: 11; 18). While case studies rely on many of the same techniques as histories in undertaking a descriptive and exploratory analysis of social phenomenon, case studies can add two further sources of evidence suited to the needs of this thesis: “direct observations of the events taking place and interviews with persons involved in the events” (*ibid.*).

A further opportunity afforded by the analytical instrumentation of case studies is that while categorised primarily as a qualitative research approach (Cresswell, 2009; 2014), case studies offer opportunities for both qualitative as well as quantitative data analysis (Yin, 2003: 19; Patton and Applebaum, 2003: 60). This methodological flexibility arises due to the richness and extensiveness of real-life contexts which case studies can present, in turn yielding a wealth of data and complexity requiring analysis of “multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 2003: 4). Such an analytical affordance provides strong supports the inductive-deductive approach adopted/required by this thesis.

This particular strength of case studies, however, has also been raised as an objection to their unsuitability in social science research. Specifically, case study analysis in the past has largely conflated analysis of the case study itself with the data-collection methods undertaken (Yin, 2003: 4). Alternatively, case study analysis has largely been based on description of the context or topics of investigation only (*ibid.*). Such

criticisms, arguably, fail to recognise the strengths case studies offer in terms of allowing researchers to grasp the complex interactions and processes at work across a particular set of phenomena. In order to achieve this, however, separation of data collection methods and analysis is required from a mere description of the case study itself (Yin, 2003: 4).

### **Case Study Sampling**

In identifying and choosing case studies for analysis, it is important to follow a research approach which is based on a purposive selection strategy. As Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) assert, case studies should be chosen on *conceptual grounds* to help illustrate and add depth to the theoretical perspective being explored. This can be achieved by selecting cases that offer “unique contexts” for study (*ibid.*: 34).

It should be acknowledged, however, that in many instances an element of “convenience sampling” occurs whereby the final selection is influenced by additional, non-purposive factors, such as geographical proximity to the researcher and dates of events suited to the timeframe of the study (*ibid.*: 32). In selecting case studies for this thesis such a phenomenon was recognised and a balance between conceptually optimal and convenient case studies was sought at all times.

In selecting case studies for analysis in this thesis, a conceptual map of the contemporary media environment was developed as a top-level framework to give consistency to case study selection (see *Table 1*). This framework was based on Wiley *et al.*'s (2012) approach to the contemporary media environment which is strongly aligned with the thesis' ontological perspective set out in *Chapter 3* inasmuch as the authors recognise the a networked media space instantiated through multiple actors, symbolic-material properties and complex, emergent relationships (Wiley *et al.*, 2012). Given the importance of digital technologies in the contemporary media environment (Schwab, 2016), the presence and use of digital media and/or digital technologies (as defined in the analytical model in *Chapter 2*) was also included as a requisite for case study selection.

**Table 1 – Framework of the constitutive categories in a contemporary media environment**

<b>Milieu Type</b>	<b>Network Type</b>	<b>Constitutive attributes</b>	<b>Categories of articulation</b>	<b>Practices</b>
Social	Social	People; interpersonal communications	Narratives; spatial frames	Inter-personal interaction
Geographical / Physical	Place	Places; paths; means of transport	Physical channeling; spatial expression	Displacement; mobility; Emplacement
Media	Media	Media; media contents	Agendas; narratives; spatial frames	Media use
Digital	Digital	Software; hardware; algorithms; data;	Data, narratives, digital objects, e.g. hashtags, etc	Code, information flows, visualisation

Using this framework, a number of cases were purposively selected that include a majority (at least three out of four) of the conceptual areas. This selection strategy aimed to ensure that each case study offers the empirical analysis as much conceptually relevant material as possible while being flexible enough to not limit the range of available cases for analysis.

For the final empirical analysis three case studies fitting the above purposive criteria were selected. The decision to adopt multiple cases for analysis was made to support the aims of the thesis. Although, multi-case sampling doesn't necessarily improve the overall generalisability of the results it does, however, support the development of any underlying theory being investigated as it generates a "confidence our emerging theory is generic" as it can be identified in multiple settings (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014: 34).

The three case studies selected for final analysis in this thesis are presented below (see *Table 2*):

**Table 2 – Case studies selected for empirical analysis**

<b>Case study title</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. NUS's #Demo2012	Student demonstration organised by the NUS, students' union, against UK government higher education policy
2. Animal rights activists versus Adidas campaign	Online campaign organised by European animal rights activists against the sportswear and lifestyle brand, Adidas
3. The Guardian's #AskSnowden reporting	Investigative reporting from global media organisation of exclusive leaks against illegal espionage by the US and UK governments

Having identified and selected the case studies for empirical analysis, the next stage of the research design is to outline and account for the data collection methods chosen in order to gather and analyse each case study. As such, the following section will identify each method (the 'what'), provide a rationale for its selection (the 'why') and explain the data collection process (the 'how'). Moreover, each method will include a discussion of any limitations or ethical issues arising and attention paid to issues of validity and reliability. Finally, given the significance of the researcher's role in the data collection and empirical analysis a section covering reflexivity and self-reflection in the research will also be included.

### **Data Collection**

Based on the list of potential data collection methods identified as suited to qualitative analysis (Yin, 2003: 85-96; Creswell, 2014: 184-5; Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014), the following methods will be adopted: ethnography; media content analysis and follow-up interviews.

#### **i) Ethnography**

Ethnography is described by Angrosino (2007) as "the art and science of describing a human group – its institutions, interpersonal behaviors, material productions, and

beliefs” (Angrosino, 2007: 14). Specifically, it is a research method for “discovering and investigating social and cultural patterns and meaning in [...] social settings” which, crucially, allows researchers to discover “what people do and why” prior to assigning meaning (LeCompte *et al.*, 1999: 1). Ethnography has proven useful and important in exploring and defining factors associated with a research problem in order to identify, understand and address them - particularly when such factors are embedded in complex systems or settings and the exact participants and their relationships require further understanding (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 36).

Ethnography has been used extensively in media and communications research, predominantly to examine production and consumption of media (Hansen and Machin, 2013). In these cases, data collection methods are usually associated with observing or participating in what media audiences or practitioners are doing or saying. Indeed, Hansin and Machin (2013) argue that ethnography offers researchers a unique opportunity to study and understand media use, its effects and production by viewing them as part of people’s lives and the culture which they inhabit (*ibid.*: 60).

This rationale is particularly pertinent in the interpretation of media adopted by this thesis approaches it “not as the transmission of meaning” but rather as the production of a “territory in which geography, mobility, and economic relations play as much a role as the circulation of information and the sharing of language and cultural practices” (Wiley *et al.*, 2012: 183). In such a “territory” the use of ethnography will play an important role in de-tangling, exploring and understanding how contemporary media power might operate.

Furthermore, ethnography is an ideal research method for this thesis as it addresses the specific needs of the research design outlined above. For example, it allows researchers to start with a research problem or analytical model which can be explored through initial observation and then “elaborated and retested through continued collection of data [...] until new information confirms a stable pattern” (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 18). Thus, ethnography supports the mixed-method approach adopted in this thesis by enabling inductive and recursive analysis which can then be augmented with other data collection and analysis methods. In turn this allows the researcher to build and test a new theory of contemporary media power. Finally, ethnography plays an important role in identifying and defining new trends in specific research settings that haven’t been studied in detail or against a particular



theory before (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 45) making it well suited to address the research questions found in this thesis.

From a process point of view, ethnography involves the researcher engaging in data collection in a natural setting and collecting primarily observational data (Cresswell, 2014: 14). The data collected will feature “concern for mundane, day-today events” and “direct or indirect participation in local activities” (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014: 8) and although it requires “relatively little pre-structured instrumentation” (*ibid.*) it does present, however, other significant pre-collection considerations than other methods, in particular research ethics and reflexivity.

### *Ethics*

Given the researcher’s direct engagement with the objects of study, it is particularly important when conducting ethnographic research to consider the ethical impact and/or consequences of the research in order to protect participants from any kind of risk - whether physical, emotional, social or financial harm (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 235). As a consequence, it is essential for the researcher to evaluate the risk and benefits of the study and ensure that the benefits of the collected data outweighs the risks of its collection. It also means that researchers must identify, understand and reflect on the potential risks participants may face and address such risks accordingly in the design, conduct and analysis of the study (*ibid.*).

In order to identify and evaluate the potential risks likely to be encountered in the planned research, ethical guidelines produced by the *Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth* were consulted (ASA, 1999) and used to guide the research design in each case study. Key elements of the design are discussed in detail below.

### *Protecting Participants*

A vital tenet of protecting participants from risk in ethnographic research is the need to anticipate potential harm across the research design, data collection and data use. Given the hybrid nature of the selected case studies, consideration of preventing risk or harm were made both in terms of their online as well as offline settings. Studying online communities can be considered a relatively low risk activity due to the presumption of accessibility and availability of the public domain (Iphofen, 2013: 63). However, it is also important when undertaking ethnographies of online spaces for the researcher be present themselves authentically in the setting to avoid

intentionally misleading participants. This is achieved by ensuring the researcher doesn't seek to create anonymised or misleading online profiles or mis-represent themselves to participants (ASA, 1999; Iphofen, 2013). These considerations were adopted and built into the research both during data collection and in subsequent analysis.

While the potential for physical risk in the Adidas case study was deemed to be minimal owing to the secure office location of the offline setting, the #Demo2012 case study was identified as a case study with a higher risk for physical and emotional harm due to its inclusion of a physical protest and demonstration. This presented a number of important instances where concerns over the real risk of harm had to be addressed. For example, while undertaking ethnographic observation in public spaces is generally less problematic than highly personal settings (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007), studying a public demonstration presents the possibility of encountering highly charged, stressful situations, potentially featuring illegal actions. As such, extreme caution was taken during data collection to ensure actors were not explicitly identified or their individual rights infringed.

In order to be sympathetic to the values and norms found in public protest or demonstration settings, the planned data collection adhered to the guidelines and advice produced by the activist community designed to protect the rights of protestors during research or reporting (Camp for Climate Action, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher's previous experiences of public demonstrations enabled the research design to anticipate of scenarios likely to arise during the event and plan accordingly to minimise the risks to participants and the researcher. These scenarios included how to tell if illegal action was likely to occur and what to do to ensure anonymity of participants or when the events might turn violent and to ensure the research work is suspended to give personal safety precedence.

#### *Avoiding Undue Intrusion*

These issues link to a further tenet of conducting ethical ethnography: avoiding undue intrusion. Again, limiting intrusion in the Adidas and #AskSnwoden case studies was easier to ensure given that the settings were more formalised (i.e. a small-scale workplace in the Adidas case study) and online communities. Here observation without intrusion was feasible. In particular, the researchers previous professional experience of the settings in question meant a level of familiarity that

helped to minimise intrusion by limiting the need for questioning actions or seeking clarification on discussions. Where this was occurred, any pertinent issues were noted and saved for deeper exploration in follow-up interviews.

Again, however, the #Demo2012 case study with the researcher physically embedded in the event being studied meant taking greater caution in the research design to avoid undue intrusion. Here, it was vital that as a participant observer the researcher didn't encourage or enable (or even appear to encourage or enable) specific actions within the demonstration which could unduly affect the outcomes or consequences of situations in the research setting. This consideration is especially important where researcher intrusion could precipitate illegal actions as these would significantly increase the risk of physical, emotional, social and financial harm for participants.

#### *Right to Confidentiality*

A final ethical consideration when conducting ethnographic research is the need to ensure that participants "have the right to remain anonymous and to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected" (ASA, 1999). This tenet was used to plan data collection in that no individuals whose actions was recorded would be identified without their approval. While this logic was appropriate to the collection of ethnographic data, however, it presents further challenges when conducting follow-up research in this thesis, such as content analysis and interviewing. Here, other methods of data collection may directly (i.e. through an interview request) or indirectly (i.e. through the inclusion of textual examples from the content analysis) identify the participant. Where this is likely to occur, the ethical issues arising are addressed in the relevant research method section below.

#### *Limitations*

While ethnographic research can provide opportunities to identify and explore research questions whose factors are embedded in complex systems or settings, one limitation arising is that such findings - while rich in detail and nuance - tell us about one particular setting at one particular time (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 61). However, countering such a limitation it can be asserted that ethnography provides researchers with the relevant observational data that, along with follow-up research can help to build a more complete and richer picture of the situation being studied (*ibid.*). Moreover, as noted above, this thesis' use of multiple case studies can help

improve reliability within the study as it allows a generalising and comparison of data and results across the multiple cases in the thesis.

important concern with ethnographic research is that the ability to achieve reliable and repeatable data collection is limited owing to there being little or no systematic approach (Carrithers, 1992). In response to this, it has been argued that providing the role of the researcher in the research setting and data collection process is understood adequately and that reflexivity is used to account for the research actions taken, then a level of systematic reliability can be achieved (Hansen and Machine, 2013: 81). Similarly, it can be argued that as ethnography produces knowledge of how people engage with everyday phenomena, then it represents the *best way* to investigate the details of everyday life. As Hansen and Machin observe: “[k]nowledge is always embedded in the social world. In this sense there seems no reason that ethnography should be criticised above other methods that strive to claim to produce a form of knowledge that is indeed free-floating and independent from the social world” (*ibid.*).

### *Reflexivity*

Ethnography’s role in studying knowledge embedded in the social world foregrounds issues of subjectivity and bias when it comes to the validity of data (*ibid.*). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the researcher is able to apply a reflexivity to their own work in order to identify, reflect on and challenge their own perceptions and biases. According to Lipp (1991), reflexivity requires a critical self-reflection that addresses the ways in which the personal attributes, experiences and social background of the researcher can all influence the collection and analysis of data.

When gathering data, it is important to recognise that the background of the researcher is likely to inform their personality and behaviour and, as such, their perception of events. In response to this the phenomenologist Husserl argued that when gathering data, the researcher should ensure they practice ‘bracketing’- that is: “the process of setting aside, suspending, or holding in abeyance presuppositions surrounding a specific phenomenon.” (Gering, 2009: 1443). By identifying personal beliefs and suppositions prior to conducting research the researcher can minimise the influence their background has on data collection (Cutcliffe, 2003; Mulhall et al., 1999; Padgett, 1998).

The act of bracketing has been critiqued by some scholars as unrealistic the potential difficulties for researchers to fully “bracket off” their research activities from their entire previous lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Rather, by acknowledging the potential influence of this experience the researcher is able to “make transparent, overt, and apparent” (Gearing, 2009: 1445) their personal values in their research and thus address any issue that these may create. For example, each of the case studies analysed in this thesis present circumstances with which I was familiar. Having worked within professional media settings and also participated in public demonstrations it is important for me to ensure that all data collected is recorded in ways that capture the full exposition of the situation, rather than my taken-for-granted presumptions of events. Similarly, the data collection should strive to capture what actions or events mean to the groups being studied, not the researcher based on their past experiences.

A further reflexive concern is the issue of inter-subjectivity – a notion that focuses critical attention on the “unconscious processes structure[ing] relations between the researcher and the participant” (Marshall, Fraser and Baker, 2010). This refers to the likelihood that in field settings research participants may assign certain identities or roles to the researcher based on certain characteristics or appearances. In turn, this may affect the type and depth of research data. This issue can be addressed through close monitoring during the research process and by the researcher adapting their appearance and behaviour to support data collection – as far as ethically permissible (*ibid.*).

Again, while gathering case study data the researcher’s previous experience of the research settings meant that they could adapt their appearance accordingly. However, this also posed challenges in that while this knowledge helped to minimise the impact of the researcher in the setting, it was also necessary to ensure that the researcher’s past experience didn’t mean that they weren’t expected to participate in the activities or event they were observing. If this had happened, not only would it present challenges in recording data, in the case of #Demo2012 it may have placed the researcher at risk of participating in illegal actions.

Lipp (2007) further identifies the need for reflexivity to achieve a social critique of the socio-economic status of the researcher and the effect any power imbalances between researcher and participant may have on the data. Here the challenge is to balance any potential tension between allowing the research data enable “multiple

voices to be heard” (Finley, 2003) and avoiding over-emphasising the “underdog” (Dingwall, 1980). This is something easier to address in the Adidas and #AskSnowden case studies, than #Demo2012 where the researcher’s status as a middle-class, professional male could negatively affect relationships with student and political activist participants and limit access to situations or information pertinent to the research owing to a perceived privileged or ‘outside status’. This was addressed in part by being able to ‘blend in’ with participants – both in terms of behaviour and visual appearance owing to previous experience of demonstrations, as discussed above.

Data was collected primarily using note form, although it can also be argued that secondary ethnographic data was collected through what Caputo has termed “processual ethnography” (Caputo, 2000). While primary ethnographic data will provide invaluable of first-hand insights into the “spatialised” field setting (Angrosino, 2007) the opportunities for research can be extended by collecting and incorporating other media content published online by other participants from the setting. This can include camera phone footage or participant reflection of specific experiences. It will be gathered as part of the content analysis data collection and, as such, the ethical implications of this are discussed in greater detail below.

While Carrithers (1992) has argued that ethnography has a limited systematic approach data collection was planned to ensure that the relevant data points required to address the thesis’ research questions were gathered. This was undertaken by creating a checklist based on LeCompte and Schensul’s (2010) ethnographic data collection framework (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010: 175). This included the purpose of each data point, its target source and data content type. This ensured the data collection was clear and structured and was aligned with the core analytical pillars of the model operationalised in the thesis: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding.

When collecting the data, events were recorded as they happened, and each set of notes aimed to gather as much detail as possible to record what may have appeared as “mundane” or “everyday’ situations”, but which may have had significant effects or consequences unrecognised by the researcher at the time (Hansen and Machine, 2013: 81). In addition, data collection also paid attention to events that appeared to elicit an unusual or significant response from participants in order to capture what

could be pertinent findings through follow-up data collection – even if they were not fully understood by the researcher at the point of collection.

## ii) Content Analysis

Content analysis offers an approach to analysing media and communications systematically and objectively in a way that is particularly suited to revealing patterns and trends (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 85). While a number of early definitions of content analysis locate this method firmly on the quantitative end of the research spectrum (Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1969), more recent applications of content analysis, however, have identified it as a qualitative research instrument. For example, Krippendorff (2004) has defined content analysis as “a research technique for making [...] valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004: 18) while Downe-Wambolt (1992) asserts that content analysis can be adopted to achieve more than just measuring frequency of topics. Rather content analysis can be used to infer meaning from “verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe *and* quantify specific phenomena” (Downe-Wambolt, 1992: 314) [my emphasis].

Two dominant approaches to content analysis are manifest or latent analyses (Bengtsson, 2016). In manifest analyses the researcher quantifies evidence in the content which is usually “presented in the form of frequency expressed as a percentage or actual numbers of key categories (Bengtsson, 2016: 10). Conversely, latent content analyses are applied at an “interpretative level” allowing the researcher to identify “the underlying meaning of the text [content]: *what the text is talking about (ibid.)* [emphasis in original].

This duality of approach is important for this thesis as it supports the operationalisation of the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3*. Specifically, it allows the inductive exploration and interpretation of the analytical categories: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding identified in the model. This, in turn, can be used to augment and support the ethnographic and interview data in further qualifying, augmenting and revising the theory of contemporary media power outlined in *Chapter 2*. Moreover, by applying a quantitative analysis to the content data it is possible to determine when a media assemblage becomes coded and a media frame is established in the case studies, and thus media power exerted (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 87).

### *Ethical Considerations*

In terms of ethical considerations, content analysis is often adopted as a “low risk” collection method because if “data is freely available on the internet, books or other public forum, permission for further use and analysis is implied” (Tripathy, 2013: 1478). The concept of digital, user-generated content<sup>15</sup> problematises this perspective as while researchers may believe that users of social media post or publish content having made a fully-informed decision there remains a grey area in terms of whether social media data can be considered public or private (Potter, 2011). That is, despite the public accessibility of user-generated data published openly on social media and the terms and conditions of social networking platforms, such as Facebook, opting in their members to consent for research purposes when they sign up to the platform (Facebook, 2018; see section iii), many public users of social media report that they do not read terms and conditions of digital platforms presenting implied challenges for researchers (Wolfinger, 2016).

In this grey area, context become an important consideration in making ethical judgements for data collection. Wolfinger (*ibid.*) argues that in such equivocal contexts, researchers must take into account the thoughts and feelings of participants in their research in order to account for their attitudes towards privacy and safety. Applying this approach to the research undertaken in this thesis it seems reasonable to presume that as each case study is a high-profile public event *designed* to be publicly visible and, ultimately, largely using this visibility to achieve an impact on an outcome in each case study (i.e. influence government policy (#Demo2012); affect corporate reputation (Adidas) and shape public debate (#AskSnowden)) participants generating media digital content must intend or be willing for their voice to be heard. As a consequence, it is accepted that this data is acceptable for inclusion in the empirical analysis.

This ethical position is further supported by the *British Psychological Society* whose guidelines on internet-mediated research asserts that the question of whether social media data should be considered public or private is premised on whether users can *reasonably* expect their data to be public. For example, users posting information to Twitter (a public platform by default) should be aware that their information is open to observation by members of the public. Conversely, members of Facebook (by

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<sup>15</sup> That is, any digital “content created and provided by users, through easy-to-use ... [digital] tools” (Skalski, 2017: 210; Potter, 2011).



default, a closed platform) may expect that the information they publish has a level of privacy (Hewson *et al.*, 2017).

### *Limitations*

Despite the opportunities content analysis affords the thesis' empirical analysis the method is not without limitations. Firstly, while content analysis makes claims to objectivity which, for example, ethnographic data collection could not lay as strong a claim, it can be argued that collecting and analysing media content can't be entirely value free as it "delineates certain dimensions" for data collection and analysis (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 88). Collecting media content data, then, clearly requires the researcher to make subjective choices. In response to this tension, the content analysis undertaken in the thesis will recognise the challenges of achieving objectivity and instead will adopt a systematic approach that recognises the subjective nature of any engagement with social data. This will be guided by the analytical model developed in *Chapter 3* to ensure a level of reliability and replicability across each case study (*ibid.*: 89).

There is also a need for researchers to be aware of inferring results or meaning too easily from simple frequency counts when conducting content analysis, as there is no straight-forward relationship between content and its wider implications (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 89). To resolve such a limitation, it is important to ensure results are "anchored in a theory that articulates the relationship between media and their social contexts" (*ibid.*). This is achieved in the thesis by using content analysis to deductively assess the presence of recurring themes which code the media assemblage and create an enduring media frame demonstrating media power.

### *Selection and Sampling*

Bengtsson (2016) asserts there are a number of key steps to be considered when planning content analysis: the aim, the sample, the choice of data collection method and the practical implications for the researcher, such as ethics and reliability (Bengtson, 2016:10). The process of media selection and sampling broadly follows the approach first defined by Berelson (1952): a) select media, b) identify sample date or issue, c) sample relevant content. Typically, media selection can be based on geography; audience or media type and either single or multiple source (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 88). Given the networked characteristics of media in the thesis, and the hybridity in internet in its analytical model, media selection and sampling is drawn

from multiple sources to ensure analysis achieves a comprehensive overview of the relationships between, and across, different types of media.

Based on Skalski *et al.* (2017) media selection collected content from formal media publishers, such as institutional broadcasters and print media, as well as informal, self-published content, including blogs, and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter (Skalski *et al.*, 2017: 217-218). One particular challenge of selecting informal and user-generated content is the ability to identify and collect the, often vast, quantities of material from a widely distributed network of publishers.

To address this challenge, research technology was used to select media capable of capturing both formal, traditional media content as well as digital, user-generated content. Given the proliferation of digitised media content, the availability and adoption of technology in the collection, collation and analysis of vast quantities of research data available has grown over recent years (*ibid.*: 212-213).

Content selection and sampling was primarily conducted using the content research platform, Sysomos.<sup>16</sup> This instrument was chosen as it offered three clear benefits to the research approach. Firstly, the technology provided comprehensive access to the range of relevant data sources required by the analytical model, from institutional news content, popular social networking platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, as well as self-publishing platforms, such as blogs and online forums. Furthermore, the technology claims to hold over 200 billion content data points available up to 13 months prior to the point of research (Sysomos, 2013). While these are commercially-motivated claims (as Sysomos is a paid-for research tool built on a business model of selling access to media data) they nevertheless demonstrate a scale and depth of content that can be accessed and collected well beyond those afforded by manual methods.

Moreover, Sysomos offers access to complete Twitter data via the “Twitter Firehose”<sup>17</sup> which addresses a number of particular challenges encountered by researchers. Firstly, the sheer volume of data produced by Twitter renders manual collection problematic (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009). For example, researchers who

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<sup>16</sup> See: <https://sysomos.com/>

<sup>17</sup> The Twitter Firehose refers to the ability to access the complete range of data produced by Twitter. That is: the Firehose provides access to 100% of data, compared to other sources which only offers researchers around 1% of a randomised sample of data (Mejova, Weber, & Macy, 2015: 41-42).

build tools to gather data direct from Twitter's API<sup>18</sup> come up against the limitations applied to data collection via the open (i.e. non-commercial) API which is capped at 1% of the available data (Mejova, Weber, & Macy, 2015: 41-42; Skalski *et al.*, 2017: 222). This is primarily due to Twitter's business model, which is based on selling access to its data (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009; Thelwall, Buckley, and Paltoglou, 2011).

Secondly, the reliability and quality of data selection was improved through the researcher's ability to identify and collect data based on its inclusion of key words pertinent to the case studies. Thus, rather than relying on the researcher to pre-define the media sources most likely to be relevant to the analysis, by searching all available media sources for relevant references to each case study a broader and more inclusive dataset was collated. Thus, any irrelevant or unwanted media identified can be discarded pre-analysis thus minimising the potential for resulting data to be comprised and its reliability undermined (Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015: 801). Such irrelevant content is a unique challenge for researchers when collecting digital content, owing to the prevalence of spam content, abandoned sites or access-restricted sites potentially contaminating the data (Li and Walejko, 2008; Skalski *et al.*, 2017: 220).

To collect data using Sysomos it was first necessary to create a robust search taxonomy capable of identifying media content relevant to each case study. A taxonomy was created for each case study using a dual approach to ensure maximum accuracy and coverage of data. Firstly, a *formal* taxonomy was created that included the identification and use of popular and widely used terms and key words associated with the case study events (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011: 446). This was done by reviewing manually identified content related to each case study; then exploring and testing likely words or phrases. For example, in the Adidas case study relevant, formal terms, such as Adidas or "UEFA 2012" or "animal rights" were identified and adopted

Complementing this, an *informal* taxonomy was also developed. This is intended to identify and collect data making use of more colloquial or interpersonal terms. This taxonomy must recognise the highly personal and subjective language used to

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<sup>18</sup> API is a software development term which stands for 'Application Programming Interface'. It is a way for software on one website or platform to be connected to other third-party software. In this case, Twitter is making *some* of its data freely available to researchers while providing access to the full Firehose API for commercial clients only. See: Kiss (2007).

discuss and report events by informal media actors. This was developed by initial observation of media content arising in the case studies and more colloquial or unforeseen terms identified. Again, in the case of the Adidas case study the Twitter hashtag, #shitstorm, emerged for example. These were then used to recursively inform updates to the taxonomy.

Using these taxonomies, Boolean search queries were created for use to enable Sysomos to gather relevant data for each case study. Boolean searching enables researchers to apply a series of logic operators that apply clear sets of rules to the search software programmes used in the collection of information from large databases (Sobel & Riffe, 2015: 794). Boolean logic includes linguistic operators, such as AND, OR and NOT, and symbol-based operators, such as "...", ~ and (...), which can be used to disambiguate between the use of the taxonomic terms in different contexts (Chakraborty, Pagolu and Garla, 2013: 144).

Returning to the Adidas case study as an example, searching for *Adidas* alone returned a large quantity of data within the given date range, the majority of which was not relevant to the case study. By applying the Boolean operator 'AND' and "... " to create the search query *Adidas AND "animal rights"* it is possible to refine the search results occurring where Adidas and animal rights are discussed. By further refining this query to: *(Adidas AND "animal rights") AND ("Adidas shitstorm"~5)* we can identify social media conversations and media content where Adidas and animal rights are mentioned but, crucially, also where the key case study qualifying term, 'shitstorm' is used within five words of Adidas. Creating and testing such logic-oriented search queries for each case study will ensure high accuracy and relevance of the data collected.

Data collection conducted in this way using Boolean search can be considered purposive in that the research approach is designed to capture all relevant content from the "natural history" of an event (Lacy *et al.*, 2015: 793). But in recognising the natural history of the case studies, it is important for researchers to consider the sampling timeframe when conducting content analysis. Owing to the specific time-bound events of the case studies, sampling was conducted by date (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 94).

Hansen and Machin (2013) argue that collecting case study data can be more straight-forward than other issue- or theme-based events owing to there being relatively fixed identifiable start and end dates of the cases (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 94-95). In reality, however, case study data collection can be complicated by the fact that the media’s influence on the case study may not align exactly with its official start or end times. This was resolved in the thesis by taking a sample of data from each case study’s known timeframe and using Sysomos’ data visualisation functionality to create a graph showing content volume over time. This visualisation was then used to estimate when the most prolific period of media activity occurred for each case study. This was then adopted as the sampling period for data collection.

**Table 3 – Media content selection and sampling period by case study**

Case Study	Media Sources	Volume	Sample Date-range
#Demo2012	News articles	46	16 <sup>th</sup> to 26 <sup>th</sup> November 2012
	Blog posts	97	
	Tweets	3,198	
Adidas ‘Shitstorm’	News articles	17	1 <sup>st</sup> November to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2011
	Blog posts	8	
	Tweets	34	
#AskSnowden	News articles	6	15 <sup>th</sup> June to 17 <sup>th</sup> June, 2013
	Online web chat comments	380	
	Tweets	17,176	

Having defined and piloted the Boolean queries for each case study, searches were performed for the relevant sampling period and content downloaded (See *Table 3*). It should be noted further that as the questions and comments submitted to *The Guardian*’s online community as part of the #AskSnowden case study were not included in Sysomos’ dataset the data extraction tool, Import.io<sup>19</sup>, was used to ‘scrape’ and collect this information separately.

One other challenge identified with Sysomos arose from the fact that the platform only allows a maximum sample of 5,000 data points, e.g. news articles, tweets, blog

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://www.import.io/>

posts, etc, to be downloaded from its database.<sup>20</sup> While two of the three events studied in the thesis generated data sets within this threshold, the #AskSnowden case study produced significantly more than the 5,000 maximum within the defined timeframe. From these 5,000 a further randomised sub-set of 500 tweets (10 per cent) of data was created for detailed coding and analysis.

To address this, *Sysomos*' built-in automated analysis was used to augment and extend the investigation. Due to the increase of 'big data' sets which "by definition [...] impl[y] that the data are too big and complicated to handle or even be fully conceived by humans" such automated approaches to data analysis offer new ways to "collate, massage and analyse" content (Skalsi *et al.*, 2017: 204). This manual and computational method supports Lewis *et al.*'s (2013) call for a hybrid approach that blends computer text analyses and manual methods in order to "preserve the strengths of traditional content analysis, with its systematic rigor and contextual awareness, while maximising the largescale capacity of big data and the efficiencies of computational methods" (Lewis *et al.*, 2013: 47; (Ha, 2013). By applying this hybrid analysis to the entire #AskSnowden data-set computational processes will be used to "generate patterns and inferences" (Tookey, 2010). These include understanding the connections between concepts and themes within textual content (Park and Thelwall, 2003) and identifying recurring or significant sources within media (Morgan, 2015 in Lacy *et al.*, 2015: 799).

### iii) Interviews

The third and final data collection method adopted for the empirical analysis is interviews. Interviews are a common way of collecting qualitative data which offer researchers the ability to investigate people's opinions in greater depth (Kvale, 1996) as well as explore and understand people's actions and beliefs (Brown, 2005: 485). Interviews offer a particular benefit to the empirical analysis as they will enable the researcher to follow-up on notable or interesting observations identified in the ethnographic data or content analysis. Specifically, while the ethnographic observation applied in each case study will help provide insight into given situations, it is not always possible to directly observe such events in their entirety. Thus, interviewing participants is an effective way of gaining further detail about the wider

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<sup>20</sup> While the 5,000 sample data set available to researchers is a randomised sample drawn from across the case study time period, it is not possible to understand exactly how *Sysomos* randomises the data.

context in a way which is arguably “more powerful in eliciting narrative data” than other methods, such as questionnaires and observations (Blaxter *et al.*, 2006: 172).

On a more practical level, interviews allow better quality, more accurate, in-depth qualitative data to be collected through the researcher being able to interact directly with the participant and rephrase or explain questions so interviewees understand better (*ibid.*). Moreover, interview data can be recorded and reviewed post-event thus enabling more opportunities for analysis and thus more accurate findings (Berg, 2007).

Despite these opportunities, interviewing does present limitations that need to be recognised and addressed. Firstly, the role of the researcher must be taken into account and reflexivity applied to ensure interviews yield accurate data. For example, as Hammersley and Gomm (2008) assert: “what people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked [...] by whom and to whom, and so on; by what they think the interviewer wants; by what they believe he or she would approve or disapprove of” (Hammersley and Gomm, 2008: 100).

Bearing this in mind, it is important for the researcher to reflect on their actions during the set-up and conduct of each interview. To address this, interviewees were asked to suggest a format, time and location suitable to them to ensure they were able to speak openly and in confidence. A further limitation is that interview data will be restricted to what participants are prepared to be able to discuss. For example, if a case study included sensitive or illegal events, then the interviewee may not be willing to disclose certain facts. Similarly, recollections of events among participants will be highly subjective and therefore be subject to change over time (Alshenqeeti, 2014). For example, interviewees may feel the need to justify or post-rationalise their actions in a particular case study. As this thesis’ empirical analysis doesn’t rely solely on interview data the issue of unreliability in participants’ knowledge can be addressed by triangulating interviewees’ personal perceptions of events with findings from the other data sources.

Participants’ subjective recollections can also provide challenges for data reliability on the part of the researcher. For example, interviewers need to be careful to ensure that they don’t seek answers to meet preconceived ideas or fit hypotheses or misinterpret their interviewee’s responses. Cresswell argues that attaining reliability in

interviews is at best “elusive” (Cresswell, 2009: 153) owing to an interview’s “openness to so many types of bias” (Millward and Brewerton, 2001: 74). This will be addressed in this thesis by ensuring a constant reflexivity during the interview process and taking necessary steps to maintain validity and reliability in the data being gathered. Specifically, this will include: being alert to my own personal experiences and background and reflecting on how these may affect the interpretation of participants’ answers. I will also ensure questions asked are objective and don’t lead the interviewee into pre-conceived answers.

### *Selection*

Respondent selection was undertaken purposively in order to gain deeper, more qualitative understanding of particular actions, participant motivations and contexts that appeared significant in the ethnographic or content analysis data. Participants were identified from the ethnography and content analysis data and were contacted either via email or other digital communications tool, e.g. Facebook Messenger. These methods were selected according to what was believed to be the most appropriate method for the respondent. For example, when contacting more formal media actors publicly available email addresses were identified and used to approach respondents. Conversely, for informal media actors, digital messaging tools, such as Facebook Messenger were used to approach respondents. To ensure an ethical approach to selection respondents were only contacted if they were publicly visible and accessible on such platforms. This was taken to imply a level of receptivity to approach.

The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face or using telephone or Skype and featured a semi-structured interview, which is a more flexible version of the structured interview as “it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 88). Alshenqeeti (2014) recommends establishing and referring to a checklist in semi-structured interviews to ensure all topics pertinent to the research aims as well as follow-up points from other empirical data are addressed (Alshenqeeti, 2014: 44).

### *Ethics*

As with the ethnographic research, data collection dealing with human participants requires researchers to identify and address a number of ethical concerns. For example, Cohen *et al.* (2007) argues that collecting interview data is a highly



personal interaction both taking up personal time and risking intruding into respondents' private lives with potentially sensitive questions being asked. Similarly, Brinkmann and Kvale argue that when researchers conduct interviews they face an ethical “dilemma between wanting as much knowledge as possible while at the same time respecting the integrity of the interviewee. (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005: 169).

Resolving such a tension is challenging to researchers who don't wish to probe the respondent too much, while at the same time requiring interview data which will provide good quality insights. This ethical concern is particularly sensitive in the #Demo2012 case study where interview respondents may have taken part in – or witnessed – illegal actions. Addressing these issues, it is important that research participants will provide their informed consent before participating in the interview and will be provided with an overview of the nature and aim of the research as well as reassurance that their data will be kept confidential if required and that their participation is entirely voluntary (Alshenqeeti, 2014: 45).

### **Data Analysis**

Patton and Appelbaum's assertion that the aim of case study analyses is “to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory" (Patton and Appelbaum, 2003: 67). Following Cresswell (2007) preliminary exploration of the ethnographic data was conducted by reading through the case study materials and making notes of interesting or notable areas. The raw data was then coded by identifying and segmenting events or observations in the text, developing themes by aggregating coded segments and building connections and relationships between the themes (Cresswell, 2007: 308-309). Notable points in the data were identified for further follow-up in interviews and content analysis. The interview analysis followed a similar approach as the ethnographic analysis in that notes and transcripts from the interviews were manually coded and then grouped into inter-relating themes. Reliability was ensured by recursive exploration and triangulating the different data sources.

Following Bengtsson's dual approach to media content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) content was initially reviewed and a qualitative, theme-based analysis conducted to explore the data, identify themes and theory-build. To perform the manifest analysis, more quantitative analysis a loosely-structured and open-ended coding framework was used to analyse media content. A coding framework was created for each case

study by taking themes identified in the initial data review and combining these with a set of core analytical categories to ensure that the analysis avoided being a “fishing expedition” (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 99). These categories were based on the variables identified in the analytical model outlined in *Chapter 3* and included: media actors and sources; subjects, themes and issues present in the content; symbolic content choice (textual and visual); value dimensions and sentiment (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 98-99). It is important to note that as well as capturing symbolic components of the media content, material components were also included in order to understand their role in shaping the media assemblage. These included: evidence of software code which was identified through the ways in which was “materialised into particular code-based devices.” (Berry, 2011: 10) via elements such as HTML or hyperlinks.

The framework was piloted using a 10 per cent sample of content from each case study and then refined to improve its accuracy and relevance accordingly.<sup>21</sup> The framework was then used to analyse media content with new themes being added as the analysis proceeded to ensure an iterative and open-ended approach to coding. This “manifest” analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) will allow the content data to be viewed through a quantitative lens. This will be important to identify recurring and enduring themes or elements within the data and confirm when the media assemblages in each case study become coded and what the media frame emerging from the heavily territorialised assemblage will look like. This was achieved by evaluating when the themes or issues present in the media content and their value dimensions become consistently evident.

While quantifying media content data will support the confirmation of a coded media assemblage and its media frame, it is also important to note that the multiperspectival approach to framing addressed in *Chapter 3* will also be factored into the content analysis (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Kuypers, 2010; Reese, 2007, 2010). Specifically, this will enable the full range of elements and contexts within a media assemblage to be included in the analysis. Sounders and Dillard (2014), for example, argue that analysis of media frames needs to go beyond statistical analyses and adopt more

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that although a coding frame will be used, the coding reliability was not tested as, according to Kuypers (2010), qualitative content analysis “incorporates the subjectivity of the researcher into the final product”. Thus, analysis begins with “vague questions, or even a hunch” that shapes the research as it progresses through the interpretation of data, rather than seeking verification through a statistical verification (Kuypers, 2010: 287).

qualitative research approaches. They propose a greater focus on seeking out a wider range of “frame locations” within the data by using “critical-interpretive” analyses to enable the researcher to go beyond purely symbolic message-receiver relationships and to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts in which media framing occurs (Sonders & Dillard, 2014: 1013). This is further supported by earlier, interdisciplinary work by Goffman which offers a more nuanced perspective on frame analysis. For Goffman’s frames are “microlevel processes of social organisation” (Goffman, 1959, 1974), thus providing a fit with the complex, symbolic-material nature of media assemblages.

At each stage of analysis, a recursive pass was made of the various data sets to revise and update the coding and emerging themes. Finally, using this aggregated data, connections and relationships between themes were identified and a descriptive narrative for each case study was developed. These narratives will explore and discuss key research questions identified in *Chapter 1*, including to what degrees are the analytical pillars of the model developed in *Chapter 3* present in the case studies? Are they widely adopted – and by whom? Does their presence evolve/adapt throughout the case studies? Secondly, the analysis will assess whether the analytical pillars influence the exertion of media power by playing a greater or lesser role in coding the media assemblage and establishing a particular media frame around the case study.

Finally, the presentation of the analysis in each case study chapter will proceed by analysing the data according to the four analytical pillars establishing in the model in *Chapter 3 as it arises chronologically*. The decision to present the results in this way has been made to enable an empirical analysis that is ordered around the core pillars of analytical model - hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding - while taking into account the ontological context in which media assemblages are formed. For example, assemblages are highly historically contingent forms that evolve over time according to the specific events or interactions at a given moment (DeLanda, 2006: 40-41; Crewe, 2010: 42-43). As such, each case study is analysed as its constituting elements unfold, with the discussion focusing on the different variables of contemporary media power established in the analytical model in *Chapter 3*.

One further analytical layer that will be addressed in the empirical analysis is the significance of medium specificity. Taking this into account when analysing media

objects is important as, although symbolic-material media assemblages are created through the interaction of hybridised media actors and various media materialities, each medium's particular stylistic properties will likely generate different affordances or effects accordingly. Understanding the challenges or opportunities of each created by each medium will provide greater depth to the results of the empirical analysis.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Empirical Case Study 1: The NUS' #Demo2012**

In June 2012 the UK's national membership organisation for students in further and higher education, the National Union of Students (NUS), announced it would hold a national demonstration aimed at “step[ping] up pressure on the coalition government” which had recently passed legislation removing funding for disadvantaged students, increasing university tuition fees, and opened up the higher education market to greater private competition (BBC News, 2010; Mulholland, 2010).

The demonstration, held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012, marked an important moment for the NUS and the UK student movement for two reasons. Firstly, the demonstration – named #Demo2012 – was the first national mobilisation of students organised by the NUS since its previous public demonstration held in 2010 challenging the, then, new government's higher education policy. This event arguably represented a watershed in student politics as, although the NUS organised march in central London went ahead as planned, a significant number of grassroots students deviated from the planned route, broke through police lines and occupied the national offices of the governing Conservative Party – which were subsequently vandalised and the scene of fighting between protestors and police.

This seemingly spontaneous eruption of vandalism and violence at an ideological and geographical landmark appeared to demonstrate a renewed force among students to “fight back” against government policy (Hancox, 2011). Importantly, it represented the biggest show of student force for over a decade and proved to be a catalyst for a rejuvenated student movement which saw a wave of further protests, university occupations, vandalism and violence described by some as “the Winter of Protest” (*ibid.*).

#Demo2012 was additionally significant in that it was interpreted as a test of the NUS's ability to impact future government higher education policy as well as demonstrate continued relevance to its members. Following on from the 2010 demonstration the NUS faced criticism from students who believed the organisation distanced itself from the unplanned and controversial grassroots student activism which led media and political condemnation, but which appeared to galvanise student attitudes and action towards government policy (Landin, 2012).

In response to this, the NUS and its president, Liam Burns, saw #Demo2012 as a platform with which to reinvigorate support for the organisation among student members and reassert its importance as a relevant political movement to “promote, defend and extend the rights of students” in the UK (NUS, n.d.-b). Indeed, the purpose of #Demo2012 is stated clearly by Burns in a speech uploaded to the film-sharing website, YouTube: "In a year in which there are no votes in parliament and no legislation coming before politicians, it's about time we started setting the agenda" (NUS, 2012a). Such challenges to the NUS, while notable and significant to the empirical analysis here, are not particularly new to the organisation. Before moving into the analysis section, it is important to situate the current case study context within the NUS' history.

The NUS was established in 1922 in order to give a voice to British students at an international level and “promote, defend and extend the rights of students” (NUS, n.d.). The methods adopted by the NUS to achieve these aims have, however, varied over the past decades and have produced institutional processes or mindsets that continue to influence its actions in the present. For example, up until the 1960s the NUS had largely remained an educational pressure group using its research to influence government policy. By 1969, however, the NUS' refusal to back demonstrative action and a “no politics” clause in its constitution led some members to claim the organisation lacked credibility (Morris, 2013).

As student activism emerged and spread in the late 1960s, the NUS acquiesced and made a “momentous change to its constitution” which led to the organisation taking a more proactive stance on direct action and initiating a “new era of campaigning and protest” (NUS, n.d.) which can be traced through to #Demo2012. A further important point to consider when situating the #Demo2012 case study in the NUS' history is the fact that although the NUS grew to become the largest student organisation in Britain in the twentieth-century, it did not represent the views of all students (Burkett, 2014).

Both of these historical antecedents provide useful context for the analysis of #Demo2012 in support of students' rights inasmuch that they confirm the organisation's core mandate of using public demonstrations to help the NUS defend and promote students' rights, but also highlight that the use of direct action has long been a tension at the core of the organisation (NUS, n.d.). Moreover, despite the

NUS' claim that it is "one of the most influential organisations in the country" its policies, agenda and mandate arguably represents a minority of students. Again, such an issue will become relevant in the analysis of #Demo2012 as an increasingly digitally-empowered group of grassroots student activists diverge from official NUS policy and its organised demonstration.

### **Building the Pre-Event Narrative**

Taking into account the NUS's stated aims of using #Demo2012 to set the agenda on the future of higher education (NUS, 2012a) its initial actions suggest an effective start with consistent pre-event coverage of the demonstration featuring in both mainstream and social media. There are, however, a small yet significant series of challenges to the NUS and its agenda occurring predominantly within student media. While this represents a small proportion of pre-event coverage it nevertheless helps set the tone for a more widespread critical engagement and undermining of the NUS attempts to territorialise the media assemblage and created a coded media frame around #Demo2012. This first section will identify hybridised media behaviour between the NUS' media and campaign officers and institutional news reporters. It also traces how the economic materialism of the NUS' status as a semi-commercial organisation with full-time, paid staff (NUS, n.d.) allows it to plan and manage the media assemblage's early territorialisation in favour of its agenda. This section of the analysis focuses on the days preceding and morning of #Demo2012.

According to interview data, from the moment #Demo2012 was formally announced in April 2012, the NUS' campaigns team began developing a media relations plan with a "clear calendar of [media] actions" designed to achieve three key aims: raise awareness of the NUS' policy areas articulated by the demonstration's slogan, "Educate, Employ, Empower"<sup>22</sup>, mobilise students to take part in the demonstration and shape the media narrative around higher education in favour of the NUS' policy position (NUS, n.d.-a; NUS, n.d.-b; Hoyles, 2014; Pool, 2014).

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<sup>22</sup> 1) improve access to education; 2) improve graduate employment prospects and 3) empower students to have a stronger voice on issues that concern them (NUS, n.d.-a)



Analysis of media content data between 16<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> November 2012<sup>23</sup> identifies that #Demo2012 received prominent coverage in national news and on social media platforms ahead of the event. Following up these findings with interviews with the NUS' media and campaign managers during the demonstration, it is clear that this media content supporting the NUS is a result of a planned campaign by the NUS (Hoyles, 2014; Pool, 2014). Moreover, the data confirms that a range of techniques were adopted to help shape the media's reporting of the demonstration, such as exclusive briefings, timely intervention in the professional news cycle and public opinion surveys. Looking in-depth at these techniques and their effects allows us to understand specifically how media hybridity and materiality were used to choreograph the early stages of the #Demo2012 media assemblage and territorialise it in the NUS' favour.

The first coverage alerting the public and policy-makers to #Demo2012 appears in the newspaper, *The Observer*, on the Sunday before the demonstration. The article provides the political context within which the demonstration will take place and cites an NUS-commissioned survey indicating pessimism among parents towards future education and economic prospects for their children. While leading with a policy-focused angle, the article also allowed the NUS to link this wider political situation to the forthcoming demonstration targeting current government policy, as NUS president Liam Burns asserts:

Students from across the country will be marching through London on Wednesday to protest against a government which has disempowered a generation by abdicating its responsibility to ensure access to education and employment (Boffey, 2012)

According to an interview with the NUS' media officer at the time of the demonstration, *The Observer's* Sunday coverage was confirmed as a planned tactic by the NUS. Known as a 'Sunday for Monday', a story is given as an exclusive to a national Sunday news publication. This has two distinct benefits: firstly, as the start of the week, Monday is traditionally seen as the optimum day to launch 'news' as it provides the potential to accommodate the fullest development of a story and achieve the longest possible uninterrupted exposure. Launching on a Sunday extends this

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<sup>23</sup> This timeframe was selected based on a macro-analysis of media data generated around the event. There was little media coverage or social media interaction concerning the event outside of the dates chosen. See *Chapter 3* for a detailed discussion of research methods.

time-frame by one-day (Campbell, 2011). Secondly, news organisations monitor Sunday newspapers for stories to follow-up in their Monday editions. The Sunday for Monday tactic alerts other news outlets to the story in advance of their Monday copy deadline, thus increasing the likelihood of additional Monday coverage (Dean, 2013: 123-4).

As a result, *The Observer's* Sunday article is followed on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November by a more substantial announcement and analysis of #Demo2012 in *The Observer's* sister-title, *The Guardian* (Walker and Ratcliffe, 2012) and a shorter article revealing the event in the *Independent* newspaper (The Independent, 2012). Both articles outline key logistical information, such as publishing the designated hashtag for the event in order to start coordinating online discussion. As will be seen in the analysis below, the hashtag comes to play an important role in choreographing the symbolic content generated by demonstration participants on social media and, in turn, plays an important role in territorialising and coding #Demo2012's media frame.

Coverage supporting the NUS continues to appear in *The Guardian* on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> November in the form of another NUS commissioned survey-led news story. Here public opinion research identifies that nearly half of all UK students have considered dropping out of their course due to concerns about money. As with *The Observer's* previous survey-led story, findings are strategically aligned with the NUS' policy agenda and again act as a bridge to trail the demonstration as "a chance for students to convey their feelings to the government and call on politicians to offer a better deal" (The Guardian, 2012a).

Investigating this tactic further, an interview with the NUS' media officer confirms that the use of NUS commissioned surveys was used to manage the news agenda by ensuring a variety of newsworthy stories were available in the run up to the event (Hoyles, 2014). Further news management techniques, such as offering exclusive briefings on forthcoming stories to selected journalists working for outlets likely to be sympathetic to the NUS' position were adopted (*ibid.*) Hoyles reveals this approach was necessary as, unlike the previous 2010 demonstration timed to coincide with a major political vote, this time the NUS lacked a big story around which to achieve #Demo2012 coverage so used surveys to create lots of smaller ones (*ibid.*). Such uses of "information subsidies" (Gandy, 1982) is adopted primarily to maximise the likelihood of territorialising the #Demo2012 media assemblage in the

NUS' favour by alleviating the problems of resource scarcity and time-sensitivity of the new-gathering process.

Evidence of the NUS choreographing formal media actors to territorialise the media assemblage is further evidenced on the day of the demonstration. The national news outlet, *ITV News*, publishes a series of pro-NUS articles online. Content analysis provides timing of when these articles were published and analysis of this data, supported by interview data from Hoyles (2014) confirmed that the NUS used a media embargo to control the distribution or reporting of a story until a specific time. For example, conventional embargo strategies schedule publication of news from 00:01 – the earliest point in a day when the news can be reported. This approach ties in with the publication times of the *ITV News* coverage which, according to the timestamps in the content analysis data, appeared between 00:51 and 03:34 in the morning of Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November – suggesting the stories were either automatically scheduled by the newsroom to go 'live' after the midnight embargo or were written up and published overnight by a duty reporter.

Further evidence of the NUS using embargoed press release is identified in the content analysis data as the *ITV News* content includes substantial references to official NUS information which can be found consistently in pre-demonstration content. For example, *ITV News* coverage features a prediction of 10,000 participants for the demonstration – a figure sourced to the NUS. Following up this evidence via interviews Hoyles (2014) confirms this figure was generated and officially communicated to the media by the NUS (*ITV News*, 2012b). Subsequent *ITV News* coverage also focuses on NUS President, Liam Burns', comments that students feel "a sense of desperation for their future" (*ITV News*, 2012a) and predictions of an "epidemic of dropouts" (*ITV News*, 2012). All of which messages are drawn from NUS funded surveys and identical to information expressed in earlier coverage and can be argued reinforce the NUS' effective choreographing of media actors and territorialising of the emerging media assemblage.

According to the content analysis data, *The Guardian* publishes its lead piece on the demonstration at 08:21, including expressive content strategically aligned with, and reinforcing, earlier coverage, such as NUS predictions of 10,000 participants and the exclusive findings from an NUS-commissioned survey. At 09:29 *The Guardian* also publishes an official route map of the demonstration on its website and launches its

live-blog, a novel and hybrid approach to news-reporting that blends “conventional reporting with curation, where journalists sift and prioritise information from secondary sources and present it to the audience in close to real time, often incorporating their feedback” (Thurman and Walters, 2013: 83).

Although more autonomous than conventional news stories as a result of its curatorial function and reliance on user-generated content drawn from social media, *The Guardian*'s live-blog arguably still supported the NUS choreography of media actors. According to data gathered in an interview with its campaign officer, Lisa Pool, the NUS had agreed to help promote and share *The Guardian*'s content via its own social media channels (Pool, 2014). On the one-hand such an informal, reciprocal arrangement is characteristic of the “social capital” exchange adopted by online networks (Benkler, 2006), but it could also be read as a vital tactic in helping *The Guardian* increase its audience and receive endorsement from the NUS, a central actor in #Demo2012.

This analysis suggests evidence of hybrid media actions between the NUS formal media actors and the formal media actors reporting for national news outlets being effective in choreographing the media assemblage. Moreover, the hybridity is enabled in large part by the NUS' institutional position in being able to leverage the economic materialism of its commercially-supported specialist employees to choreograph the flow of information in the media assemblage. While the #Demo2012 media assemblage is by no means coded at this early stage, it can be argued that it is being effectively territorialised by the NUS' media management.

It is also important to note, here, that such an effect is also partly down to the medium specificity of institutional news media's dominance in the assemblage at this stage. For instance, the news media has a long tradition of working to “news beats” (Shoemaker, 1989) and liaising with formal media actors, such as media officers and campaigners, to source news stories (Gandy, 1982). As a result, it is relatively easy for the NUS to go direct to news institutions and present their stories for publication. Moreover, the tradition of news reporting is to gather information from a range of sources and “package” these into discrete stories often presenting a limited view of an event or issue (Russell, 2011). This makes it easier for institutional organisations to choreograph media assemblages as the informational inputs are consistent and relationships with news reporters already formalised (*ibid.*). Moreover, there are also commercially-established services designed to distribute organisations' ‘news’ to

publishers automatically and at scale, including news wires, such as Reuters, or press release distribution companies.<sup>24</sup> These medium-specific traits differ from the functionality of, and relationships between, informal media actors using social media platforms, such as Twitter or blogs. Here hybridity between actors becomes more informal, premised on social, rather than economic capital, and enabled by more technology-driven connections (Benkler, 2006; Breindl, 2016). As a consequence, media choreography arguably becomes more complex.

Despite this increased complexity, the NUS also actively sought to choreograph online networks of formal and informal media actors to produce content supportive of the NUS' position across social and digital media. Lisa Pool, campaigns officer for the NUS with responsibility for managing social media during #Demo2012 asserts that social media was adopted in the #Demo2012 "comm[unication]s plan as a whole [...] We had a day-by-day plan; what to put out [and] when" (Pool, 2014).

Specifically, the NUS' approach to social media involved the creation of a range of supportive content tailored to groups of targeted supporters. According to Pool the NUS spent time "looking at different audiences and putting out different articles based on different policy areas and how they would affect different people" (*ibid.*). Based on this planning "different strands of content" were created, for example:

membership facing content [...] was about fighting the argument - what was happening in terms of government and policy, updates with what was happening with the demo and ideas and tips on how to mobilise and support volunteers (*ibid.*)

This carefully targeted content was then distributed to a range of online groups and networks - both affiliated or ideologically aligned with the NUS and more general, lifestyle groups. For example, Pool acknowledges that ahead of the demonstration the NUS' 650 member-unions were provided with training to help mobilise individual students to promote the event through social media and charities, trade unions and supporters were approached "to contribute to [the NUS'] social media work as well" (*ibid.*). In addition to "friendly" networks, the NUS also contacted groups among the wider public which the NUS "felt the [#Demo2012] issues would

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<sup>24</sup> For example, PressWire (see: <https://presswire.com/about>) or Journolink (see: <https://journolink.com/>).

have affected” (Pool, 2014), such as the influential online parenting forum, Mumsnet, to help promote #Demo2012.

Content analysis of a sample of Twitter data gathered from the period leading up to the start of the demonstration indicates that the overall tone of conversations is overwhelmingly supportive. Approximately two-thirds (45 per cent) of tweets published contain personal expressions of support, anticipation and excitement about Demo2012 (See: NextGenLab, 2012; MacDoo, 2012; Peters-Day, 2012; Woodburn, 2012); share logistical information (See: Sowards, 2012; NUS\_LGBT, 2012); provide formal legal advice for those on the demonstration (See: GBCLegal, 2012; Day, 2012); quote key NUS policy messages (Peltz, 2012) and share supportive media coverage (Alice, 2012). Looking in more detail at supportive Twitter content, it is evident that this is predominantly generated by official NUS representatives. Moreover, these formal NUS actors represent the most active Twitter users ahead of the demonstration responsible for 41 per cent of all tweets published in the pre-event period.

On the one hand, this data appears to demonstrate that the hybridised approach to media choreography by the NUS appears to have been effective in terms of territorialising the online narrative around #Demo2012. In a way not dissimilar to its relationship with institutional media, the NUS identified a number of formal and informal actors and sought to provide pre-prepared information for them to post on Twitter. Where this was effective in mobilising actors, such as fellow trade unions and left-wing groups, it can be argued that the status and agency of the NUS as an organisation likely played a part in influencing the publication of content. Conversely, this approach was less successful with more mainstream, unaffiliated groups, such as Mumsnet where the NUS’ institutional position and agency has less influence (Pool, 2014).

It is also important to be aware of the role Twitter as a medium plays in enabling this choreography - as well as the limitations it produces. Founded in 2006, Twitter has since 2007 achieved high user-growth levels with 326 million users currently active on the platform daily. This early growth, however, created technological problems for the platform in that it was prone to crashing when popular events or high-profile users published information (Christian, 2018). A further difficulty for Twitter was that it initially struggled to define its purpose and functionality. Although it was

originally developed as a way for groups of friends to share information with each other by broadcasting SMS messages, one of its founders, Ev Williams, claims that Twitter had “a path of discovery [...] where over time you figure out what it is” (Lapowsky, 2013). Crucially, the original intent for Twitter evolved to create a platform that focuses both on multi-media short-form messages with a highly inter-personal nature (MacArthur, 2018).

A key consequence of this lack of direction, however, has led to Twitter’s users creating their own ways of using the platform. For example, in its early days Twitter users had no way of replying to each other’s messages. As a result, users began including an @ symbol in front a username to identify another user within a Tweet. This functionality was widely adopted by users and eventually became added as an official function on the Twitter platform. As various, user-driven functions evolved, such as hashtags and retweets,<sup>25</sup> such features became formally adopted by the platform (MacArthur, 2018). This early lack of clarity as to Twitter’s purpose, its technological frailty and largely user-driven development has shaped its adoption among media actors with its inter-personal nature lending itself more to informal rather than formal actors and information exchange remaining fleeting, short-form and difficult for formal, commercial media institutions to adopt (*ibid.*).

Although tweets supporting the NUS dominate the Twitter narrative ahead of the demonstration, criticisms of the NUS, its policies and leadership are also voiced from a range of left and right-wing ideological positions (See Bastani, 2012; Collins, 2012; Grant, 2012; Morgan, 2012a; Shorthouse, 2012). Although, representing a minority (34 per cent) of total pre-demo Twitter content, these critical tweets are significant in two distinct ways. Firstly, the theme and source of the tweets further reinforce the apparent disconnect between the NUS as an institution and its grassroots members with the most prevalent single critical theme (35% of all negative tweets) featuring an image of the contentious chant sheet promoted by the NUS Vice President (Stace, 2012).

These tweets, the majority published by grassroots students, amplify criticisms voiced by student media and thus reinforce the sense of disconnect between the NUS as a formal institution and its members. Importantly, and as will become increasingly

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<sup>25</sup> Term used to describe the forwarding or re-sharing of a tweet.

important, such members are technologically empowered and able to make their dissatisfaction known, in turn undermining the NUS' ability to effectively choreograph the media assemblage towards its own agenda.

Secondly, these criticisms also reveal the structural limitations of the NUS as an institutional actor within social media. While content analysis of Twitter indicates that formal NUS representatives were tweeting and re-tweeting supportive material as per the NUS' social media strategy, it appeared that no-one representing the NUS was responding to users posting critical content. Pool (2014) explained that, while aware of the negative content, the NUS was prevented from engaging due to the hierarchical and formalised organisational structure of the institution which prevents executive officers commenting on political issues. As a result, political responses require sign-off from elected members – a bureaucratic approach to media management which functions well for formal, deliberative decision-making but isn't suited to the inter-personal nature of social media, such as Twitter, as discussed above. This all contributes to a shift in choreography where grassroots participants and activists are able to start reterritorialising the media assemblage away from its early pro-NUS position.

Evidence of the NUS' attempts to choreograph social media continues to be found in an analysis of blog content published. Of the 25 blog posts published between 00:00am on 16<sup>th</sup> November and 11.00am on 21<sup>st</sup> November 52 per cent express support for the NUS. Many blogs reference or directly re-produce NUS material, such as mainstream media coverage (Defend The Right To Protest, 2012; Anticuts, 2012); publish expressions supportive policy analysis (Wright, 2012); sharing practical and logistical information, such as the route map and rendezvous points (Central Students Union, 2012); and issuing 'call outs' to mobilise readers to attend the demonstration (Angela, 2012; Bellaciao, 2012). As with Twitter content, pro-NUS content is published on blogs managed by student unions, trade unions and anti-cuts campaigning groups, again, supporting the likelihood that such material was generated through the NUS' strategic approach of targeting affiliated members or ideologically aligned groups (Pool, 2014).

Conversely, 28 per cent of blog posts published in the same timeframe are critical of the NUS and #Demo2012. Negative coverage includes further repetition of the stories dominating student media, such as the offensive chant sheet issued by the



NUS (EditorLibertine, 2012) and the student union ‘bribery’ story (Monnery, 2012). Politically motivated criticism is also present, with right-wing, pro-market critiques of NUS policy (Crossley, 2012) and left-wing critiques of the NUS’ failure to offer a radical alternative to pro-market reforms of higher education (Margeson, 2012; Sampson, 2012).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the nature of student politics, the source of such critical blog posts suggests they are exclusively written by politically motivated individuals or groups aligned with a number of anti-NUS positions, such as right-wing, pro-market ideology, Liberal Democrat affiliated groups unhappy with the NUS’ links with the Labour Party and far-left-wing radicals dissatisfied with the NUS’ moderate approach. Such politically dissatisfied groups are acknowledged by the NUS’ communications team as a persistent presence that have been defeated “democratically” and, while wanting to address their concerns, believe that “there's nothing to be gained from engaging in arguments in public forums on social media” (Hoyles, 2014). As will be seen subsequently, such political dissatisfaction – particularly on the activist and far-left – plays a significant part in the coding the media frame around #Demo2012 once the demonstration gets underway.

While the evidence at this point in the case study continues to suggest the NUS uses its dominant institutional position to effectively choreograph the territorialisation of the #Demo2012 media assemblage in its favour, the limits of this hybrid behaviour can already be glimpsed. For example, successful choreography is visible when building relationships with formal actors, such as news reporter and informal media actors on social media affiliated to the NUS. Where the organisation seeks to engage with more media actors outside of the NUS’ organisational influence, such as student media or wider public groups, its ability to choreograph the assemblage has limited results. Moreover, the evidence points to an organisational disconnect in that the formal, heavily bureaucratic ways in which the NUS operates prevents it from effectively developing truly hybrid behaviours, such as interacting and sharing information with, informal groups. This limitation, combined with the critical media content generated by grassroots student and political groups, starts to deterritorialise the media assemblage effectively choreographed by the NUS up to this point.

## **Material Media Objects: Images of Space/Place & Hyperlinks**

As identified in the analytical model in *Chapter 3*, the media objects created in media assemblages include both symbolic content as well as material components. From content analysis of the media data gathered for this chapter it has been possible to identify material media objects that appear to play a significant role in territorialising the Demo2012 media assemblage. It can be argued that these objects, specifically physical locations and the technological materialism of hyperlinks, constitute an autonomous layer of media objects that function largely outside of direct human or institutional agency.

For Endres and Senda-Cook (2011), place is a “particular location” constituted by “a combination of material and symbolic qualities” (Endres and Senda-Cook 2011: 259). Similarly, space is the “more general notion of how society and social practice are regulated (and sometimes disciplined) by spatial thinking” (*ibid.*). As such, places and space can account for how the “confluence of physical structures, locations and bodies can function rhetorically” (*ibid.*: 261). Applying such a reading to social movements and protest events, Endres and Senda-Cook argue that place and space exert “a fluid tension between materiality and symbolism” (*ibid.*: 262) that can “have a variety of results beyond the intent of protest organisers” (*ibid.*).

For example, although representations of significant places and spaces are included by news sub-editors, bloggers and Twitter users in the case study’s media content to evoke a particular reading of accompanying text, the imagery used is ultimately open to greater symbolic interpretation. The highest prevalence of place/space expressed rhetorically in the data is found within the institutional media coverage where 41 per cent of articles feature representations of key London locations. Significantly, place in this content is expressed entirely negatively, with recurring images of the violence and property destruction at the Conservative Party headquarters at Millbank during the previous NUS demonstrations in 2010 (Chessum, 2012; ITV News, 2012c; Landin, 2012; Walker and Ratcliffe, 2012).

Social media, however, offers a more balanced interpretation of space/place. On Twitter, 11 per cent of tweets generated during the pre-event period represent space/place with approximately half of showing empowering images of student protestors reclaiming the politically symbolic space of the Embankment given its approach to the Houses of Parliament with a massed presence. Conversely, the

remaining tweets show the violent and confrontational scenes at Millbank from the 2010 demonstration. Blog content features entirely positive images of space and place with pictures of students either occupying the politically symbolic place of Parliament Square or using their massed ranks of bodies and banners to control the space along Victoria Embankment, the politically potent approach to Parliament (Margeson, 2012; Rhianr, 2012).

These results are significant as they further demonstrate how despite the NUS' attempts to choreograph the media assemblage using the techniques discussed above the violent and confrontational representations of space and place presents a symbolic expression at odds with the NUS' overall goals. One reading of this may follow the established view that the institutional media is more likely to adopt "spectacular" representations of protest, typified by confrontation, violence and property damage (Kellner, 2012; Cable, 2017). Conversely, more informal actors on social media are more likely to follow inter-personal agendas, in this case the grassroots coordination and mobilisation for the demonstration. This is seen in the expressions of physical space and place by student activists who interpret such confrontational scenes as positive and empowering representations of protest where the demonstrators take control of London's politically-symbolic spaces.

Another important feature identified in the media content analysed is the hyperlink. Described as perhaps one of the most ubiquitous and significant - but often overlooked - attributes of online content (Turow, 2008) hyperlinks operate as online "gateways" offering internet users "passages from one website to another" (Anderson, 2010).<sup>26</sup> More conceptually, hyperlinks act as "associative trails" that enable "individuals and organisations to nominate what ideas and actors should be heard and with what priority. They also indicate to readers which associations among topics are worthwhile and which are not" (Turow, 2008: 4). The skills required to embed hyperlinks into digital content is relatively straight-forward, requiring some basic knowledge of HTML code to generate a feature of media content which, in turn, acts as a distinctly material layer in media assemblages (Hargittai, 2008: 87).

Hyperlinks cannot be understood as a neutral by-product of news production. Rather they are deployed (or not) strategically by media actors to achieve a specific purpose,

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<sup>26</sup> Although, as Turow (2008) notes, the nature and use of hyperlinks has multiplied in recent years to include functionality such as 'hot areas'; 'tags'; APIs and a range of additional applications the basic use of links as connections between websites or web content is adopted here.

such as highlighting specific information or directing readers to selective sources (Turow, 2008: 4). The adoption of such strategies depends on a variety of motivations, including economic, informational or promotional and are also closely inter-related with a range of additional macrostructural factors, such as technological infrastructures and affordances, media cultures, organisational routines and commercial strategies (Anderson, 2010: 4).

As a result, the “linking strategies” (*ibid.*) at work within the content produced during #Demo2012 represent a series of complex practices centred around a material media object which in turn play an important role in the choreography of the media assemblage’s territorialisation by largely informal actors. During the pre-event timeframe, the majority of online news stories either didn’t include hyperlinks or featured hyperlinks linked to other relevant content on the same website. Only 11 per cent of news articles linked to external, third-party sites. By comparison, 39 per cent of Twitter content included external links, while 56 per cent of blog posts contained links to external content.

While difficult to compare these data with other studies looking at the prevalence of links in media content due to differences in methodology and source material (Anderson, 2010: 2) these results appear to reflect more broader findings. According to Dimitrova *et al.* (2003) only 4 per cent of links in online news content linked to external sites compared with over half (51 per cent) of blogs and between 14 to 30 per cent for Twitter (Herring *et al.*, 2005).

The type of content linked by different media platforms varies significantly. For example, the two institutional news media stories linking to external content is strikingly divided: one article linked to information about the demonstration on the NUS official website, the other – *The Guardian*’s ‘live-blog’ – featured links to a diverse range of third-party content, such as tweets, news reports and videos from a similarly diverse range of sources, including professional journalists, NUS representatives, grassroots students and activists (Owen, 2012). In keeping with this approach content externally linked to by blogs was similarly diverse with posts linking to news media coverage, detailed political and policy analyses and official NUS content – predominantly sourced from other blogs. (Angela, 2012; Sampson, 2012; Margeson, 2012).

From these findings there is a clear dichotomy in the use of links between institutional media and social media with the former deploying outbound links in a very small number of instances (while extensively linking in to their own site content) and the latter linking to external, third-party sites routinely. Moreover, a clear divide is visible between the two media in terms of the type of externally linked content. With the exception of *The Guardian*'s live-blog (which is discussed separately below) the news media linked exclusively to formal, institutional actors (BBC News, 2012a and 2012b; *ITV News*, 2012b; *The Guardian*, 2012a; *The Independent*, 2012; Mulholland, 2012) while Twitter and blog content linked to a diverse range of information, including formal sources, such as news and the NUS as well as activist and public opinions and informal policy analysis by bloggers.

Such results can be read on one level as potentially representative of less technologically-savvy formal news media actors not possessing the technical skills to insert links into their work (Phillips *et al.*, 2009). However, while this may once have been the case, given the increasingly technical knowledge of media actors and the fact that all news organisations now operate professional 'Content Management Systems' capable of inserting links with minimal expertise, combined with evidence that the prevalence of outbound links in mass media content has declined over time it is unlikely to be an adequate explanation for the mass media's linking strategy (Tsui, 2008).

Moreover, links *were* deployed in news media content, but only as inbound links to supplementary stories by the same news outlet (BBC News, 2012a and 2012b; *The Guardian*, 2012a; Mulholland, 2012). This evidence further rules out a politically motivated or media gate-keeper argument (Dimitrova *et al.*, 2003) as no evidence of selective linking to external sources was visible in the data. A more likely explanation for mass media linking strategies is the increasing commercial imperative for professional news outlets to remain economically viable in an era when the traditional business models of news are being undermined by the internet (Anderson *et al.*, 2012; Currah, 2009).

Conversely, bloggers and Twitter users see external links as a positive feature of digital media offering informal media producers a number of benefits (Beindl, 2016). For instance, linking to external sources enables informal media actors to point readers to wider evidence that supports the arguments made in blog posts or online

debates. More importantly, linking alerts informal media actors that there are others engaging with them and sharing their opinions, ideas or content (*ibid.*; Benkler, 2006). One crucial outcome of this is the development of relational networks – however loose or temporary – around particular events or themes as in a “networked public sphere” (Benkler, 2006). In the case of #Demo2012, for example, this could include the theme of student politics or government higher education policy discussed on blogs or a shared interest in mobilising for and participating in the demonstration emerging through discussions around the hashtag #demo2012 on Twitter.

Read as such, external links act as material media objects within symbolic content that can catalyse the spread of ideas and content rapidly by connecting with and leveraging reciprocal relationships across networked individuals or groups. While this phenomenon could technically be used by all media actors, the evidence above indicates that it is predominately adopted by informal media actors. Moreover, where linking is used by formal media actors it largely fails to connect to external networks, instead focusing inwardly on its own content. This suggests that informal actors possess a greater ability to choreograph the media assemblage through linking and scaling content distribution quickly, compared to news media.

This phenomenon can also be related to the economic materialism of media assemblages. News media arguably link within their own news content in order to drive people deeper into their own site, in turn being exposed to more advertising, rather than connecting them with other interesting information. This is as opposed to social capital motivations underpinning linking across networked groups (Benkler, 2006). While this evidence also highlights a hybridity of media behaviour as informal actors connect with each other and coalesce into hybridised groups producing and sharing content about #Demo2012, there is limited evidence of formal media actors participating in these linked networks. As a consequence, it is possible to argue that informal networked actors can use material links to develop hybridised networks that can more effectively choreograph and territorialise the #Demo2012 media assemblage.

The specific implications of this can be seen from the evidence. Whereas the NUS was initially effective in territorialising the #Demo2012 media assemblage in its favour through choreographed media management, the proliferation of content being

produced and linked by networked informal media actors content introduces information which challenges the NUS' official position and starts to deterritorialise the pro-NUS media assemblage.

### **Demo2012 Event Analysis: Space and Place as Catalysts for Coding**

As demonstrated above, the NUS' techniques were effective in choreographing hybrid networks of media actors to territorialise the #Demo2012 media assemblage to their own agenda. This was, in part, due to the NUS' ability to leverage both its economic materiality and organisational agency in employing specialists to manage the choreography of institutional actors, such as news reporters and individual and collective trade union affiliates. Once the demonstration gets under way, however, the NUS' ability to influence the choreography and territorialisation of the media assemblage becomes challenged by a growth in informal media actors with repertoires of more radical, hybridised behaviours. The following section will analyse the materiality of space and place, the related spatial practices of specific groups of demonstrators as well as the highly hybridised media actions responsible for producing content which ultimately codes the Demo2012 media assemblage.

According to the NUS' media officer, the route selected for Demo2012 was designed fundamentally to avoid politically significant locations, such as Parliament Square, or focal points for the violence and property damage seen during previous student protests, such as The Conservative Party headquarters on Millbank and other central London locations targeted during protests (Hoyles, 2014). This is acknowledged by NUS president, Liam Burns, when he asserts that in planning the demonstration, the NUS has "done everything [it] can to negate violence," and that NUS members "are quite clear about this being a peaceful demonstration. I think we've set the tone right" (Sheriff, 2012b).

Instead of adopting the usual London route for political protests, taking in Trafalgar Square, Whitehall and Parliament (Hind, 2012), the #Demo2012 route passes on the southside of Parliament Square and then crosses the Thames heading away from Parliament towards south London. It ended in a rally in Kennington Park which, critics argued, would lead to an "ineffective" demonstration away from the UK's centre of political power (Sheriff, 2012c). As Hind (2012) asserts, every major protest has traditionally taken its

route *north* of Westminster Bridge, not over it to the south, because every protest has wanted to face the House of Parliament for the longest period possible, before heading along Whitehall to Downing Street. Every march I've been on slows down on this bend as people take a good old look at it, shout a lot and generally increase their rowdiness! (Hind, 2012)

The role of the police in planning such a contentious route is revealed further by Hoyles (2014), who acknowledged:

There was no way of getting [#Demo2012] through Parliament with the police. There'd have been no demo at all. We had to go to an end point: not Hyde Park as that was ruled out after the TUC event due to the Fortnam & Mason incident [occupation by anti-cuts protestors following a trade union demonstration]. The only choice we had in terms of getting police say so for it was to go to the [Kennington] Park (Hoyles, 2014)

Moreover, on the day of the demonstration London's Metropolitan Police was involved in enforcing restrictions through the use of Section 12 Public Order legislation (NUS, 2012b). This legislative form of spatial management was implemented to minimise disruption to the pre-agreed route and augmented by the physical use of rolling road-blocks and cordons to guide and control participants along the route with reinforced police lines and crowd-control barriers at important landmarks or flashpoints, such as outside the Houses of Parliament (Author's notes).

Such evidence suggests that both the NUS and the Metropolitan Police recognised the potential of the material environment to influence the disruptive potential of #Demo2012 and sought to manage it accordingly. In acknowledging such a notion, social movement scholars, Endres and Senda-Cook (2011), assert that the places and spaces of a demonstration are "more than just a backdrop for the rhetoric of social protest" (2011: 260)<sup>27</sup>. Rather, the authors argue that the "confluence of physical structures, locations and bodies can function rhetorically" (*ibid.*: 261) to generate "a variety of results beyond the intent of protest organisers" (*ibid.*: 262). It can be argued that this generative potential of space-place-body interaction is evident during

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<sup>27</sup> The authors differentiate 'place' from 'space' by asserting that the former is a "particular location" constituted by "a combination of material and symbolic qualities [...] imbued with meaning and consequences" whereas the latter is the "more general notion of how society and social practice are regulated (and sometimes disciplined) by spatial thinking" (Endres and Senda-Cook 2011: 259-260).



#Demo2012. By attempting to manage the physical environment, the NUS (with the Metropolitan Police) seemingly created a set of material conditions that transformed grassroots support for the NUS into negative sentiment resulting in a significant transformation in the way the media assemblage becomes choreographed and deterritorialised from the NUS' earlier agenda.

From the outset of #Demo2012, the NUS' choice of a self-contained environment for demonstrators to congregate in the pre-march period represents a deliberate use of physical space. The choice of a small "assembly space" was intentional "so it felt like a massive demo" for participants, while the presence of "[television] cameras and people hanging banners on the bridge overlooking the assembly space and speeches on megaphones" was designed to create a sense of power and build excitement ahead of the march (Hoyles, 2014). This evidence suggests that the NUS carefully planned the material spaces of the demonstration to enhance participants emotions and support as well as present a more visually impactful symbolic image in media content.

Once underway, however, participants were continually directed along the demonstration route and encouraged to keep moving in order to prevent a critical mass of participants from congregating and initiating the type of disruption seen during the 2010 demonstration (Walker and Paige, 2010). This containment tactic – implemented through coercion by NUS stewards and subsequently by the threat of arrest by police (Author's notes) - is initially met with little resistance by the majority of the participants. This is possibly due to the fact that the early part of the march progresses along Victoria Embankment, a historically symbolic landmark for political demonstrations (Hind, 2012). This location also acts as a physical space which channels demonstrators into a tightly-grouped, banner-waving and chanting crowd. This creates a powerful and symbolically-charged demonstration of the solidarity and strength of the NUS and its supporters (Albury, 2012b; Parker, 2014).

As the #Demo2012 route arrived at the end of the Embankment it came to a fork in the road, either turning right towards the politically-symbolic space of by the Houses of Parliament and Parliament Square or left towards the official NUS rally location in South London. Despite the police cordon indicating the route and NUS stewards directing participants across Westminster Bridge a number of demonstrators began to

congregate in front of the police barriers blocking entrance to Parliament Square (Author's notes; Kenny, 2012).

At this point two significant events occur: firstly, a group of around 150 protestors (see entry at 12:56pm in Owen, 2012) attempt to break through police lines into Parliament Square. This results in “scuffles” with police (Author's notes and NatSam, 2012) and leads to a stand-off between police and demonstrators (Author's notes). Secondly, when this attempt to reach Parliament Square fails, another group of demonstrators initiate a sit-down protest at the entrance to Westminster Bridge in an attempt to prevent the march from continuing on its route (Author's notes and TheFounder, 2012). This group articulates the argument that the end destination of the march is politically ineffective and urge demonstrators to remain at Parliament to have its voice heard – the stated aim of #Demo2012 (Owen, 2012 and Author's notes).

As noted above, place exudes “a fluid tension between materiality and symbolism” (Endres and Senda-Cook, 2011: 262). This oscillation between the two properties has a significant effect on the territorialisation of the media assemblage. On the one hand Parliament is significant to demonstrators as a symbolic place of political power, while on the other it also operates as a physical place where demonstrators can congregate, display the strength of their movement and express their opposition to the government's policies. Moreover, the location operates physically *and* symbolically as a place where historic student protests have gathered to protest to parliament (Walker and Paige, 2010).

Making sense of these overlapping interpretations and significances of place, Parkinson (2009) argues that:

public space<sup>28</sup> does convey meanings and can have behavioural effects, but those meanings are socially constructed, the effects socially mediated, dependent on narratives as well as physical factors (Parkinson, 2009: 8)

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<sup>28</sup> The interpretation of the terms space and place vary between scholars or scholarly fields. Here Parkinson refers to public space as “space that is public because it used for public purposes. This might be space like major town squares or the grounds of legislatures where the *demos* gathers to influence public decision making, perhaps through demonstrations” (Parkinson, 2009: 5). This is comparable to Endres and Senda-Cook's notion of place (2011), rather than space *per se*.

If we read Parliament's significance through the lens suggested by Parkinson – that is, as a physical space interpretable only through a narrative socially constructed by protestors - it can be argued that Parliament becomes a symbolic political landmark central to #Demo2012, but one which the police, the NUS and the route itself prevent demonstrators from accessing.

Having been initially imbued with a sense of physical solidarity created by the NUS' choice of assembly space and the route's politically-charged march along the Embankment, the actions of the NUS and police in preventing access to the politically symbolic space of Parliament arguably undermine any perceived political power possessed by the demonstrators (Hinds, 2012). In response to this physical disruption and political frustration, demonstrators act spontaneously. First, they attempt to break through barricades into Parliament Square and second they initiate a sit-down protest on Westminster Bridge in an attempt to force participants to remain at Parliament to continue protesting and, ultimately, force a way through to Parliament Square rather than continuing to the NUS' planned rally location in Kennington Park (Author's notes).

It is at this point in the demonstration that many of the participants begin to recognise that the official route, turning away from Parliament, is likely to be of limited efficacy in achieving the NUS' stated aims of empowering students to make their voices heard by the government. As a result, the initial solidarity and anger against government policy accrued among the grassroots student and education activist movement begins to be refocused on the NUS and its leadership's apparent complicity with the police and political authorities in holding an emasculated demonstration.

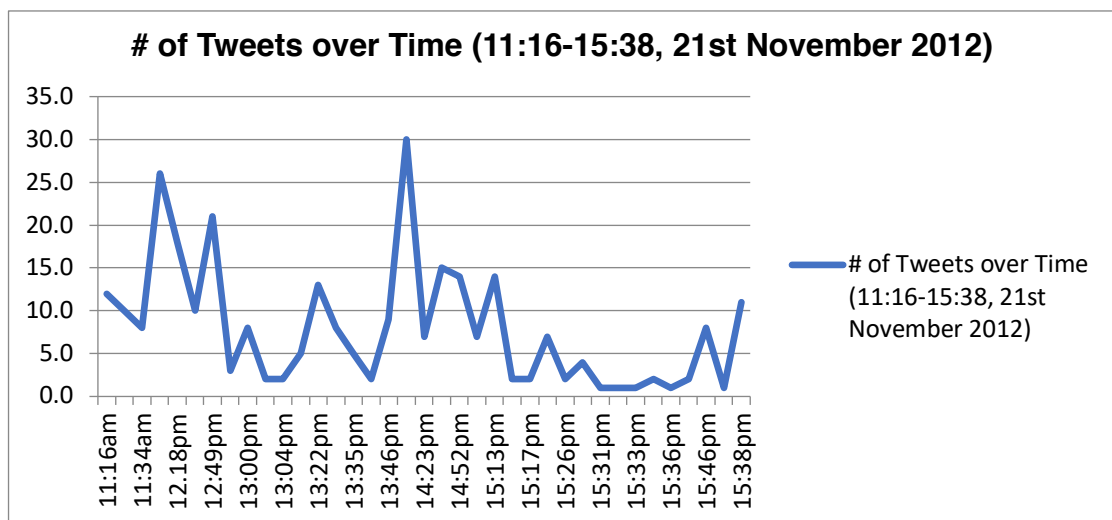
Arguably, events at Parliament and Westminster mark a turning point in attitude among grassroots students towards the NUS. For instance, the majority of media content generated during the march is critical of the NUS (53%) with some of the strongest negativity arising as demonstrators live-tweet<sup>29</sup> anti-NUS sentiment in increasing volume via Twitter. Dominant themes identified in the data include criticism of NUS leadership and efficacy as a grassroots organisation; the absence of politically symbolic landmarks on the route; the demonstration's climax in a seemingly insignificant and remote part of South London and the perceived

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<sup>29</sup> The use of Twitter to report on an event or issue in a real-time or 'live'.

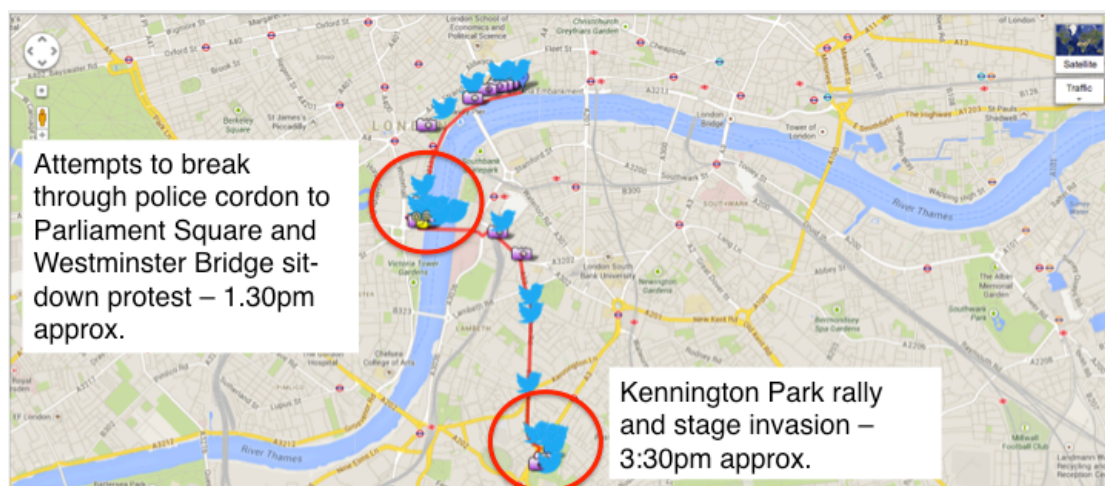
relationship between NUS stewards and the Metropolitan Police. (Anticuts, 2012; PeterHunt19, 2012; Pinkichiban, 2012).

It's also possible to draw a quantitative inference of the significance of the Parliament/Westminster Bridge events in shifting the expressive narrative. Analysis of Twitter data gathered for the duration of the demonstration indicates that the frequency of tweets published gains momentum at times consistent with the events discussed (see *Figure 1*). This indicates that during the Parliament stand-off and Westminster Bridge sit-down protest that took place between approximately 12.50pm and 1:30pm (and the stage invasion at the rally discussed later) the quantity of content generated is greater than at other points during the demonstration. This suggests that the physical, spatial environment impacts on both the qualitative (i.e. generating negative expressive content) and quantitative (i.e. velocity and volume of expression) production of media objects during the event.



**Figure 1** – Frequency of tweets produced during #Demo2012 (11am-4pm)

Such an argument is also supported by an additional analysis of tweets, YouTube films and images shared by reporters from the student media outlet, *East London Lines*. This data plotted geographically further demonstrates that larger volumes of negative or anti-NUS content is expressed at key flashpoints on the route. These locations (circled) represent both the stand-off at Parliament and sit-down protest on Westminster Bridge and events at the final rally at Kennington Park (discussed below) (see *Figure 2*).



**Figure 2** – Annotated Google Map visualising social media content produced along the #Demo2012 route. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1mRVtvd>.

If we understand the events at Parliament as a spontaneous creation or amplification of critical sentiment towards the NUS triggered by the material environment, the spatial practices deployed by a distinct group of anti-NUS activists act as a further material component of #Demo2012 which plays a decisive role in choreographing the overall coding of the media assemblage.

The activists, seemingly affiliated with the Twitter account @imaginary\_party<sup>30</sup>, appear to have aimed to disrupt #Demo2012 through the use of high-profile banners (Lemmy, 2012; Qasim, 2012) and the circulation – both physically and virtually – of an anti-NUS manifesto – (Author's notes and Imaginary\_Party, 2012) calling for students to “Smash the NUS” and replace it with a genuine left-wing, grassroots-led organisation. This activity is arguably highly hybridised in that the activists engage with participants physically on the demonstration as well as interacting with informal participants and formal news reporters on Twitter (*ibid.*). This all culminates in a group of Imaginary Party activists heckling NUS speakers and initiating a stage invasion at the official #Demo2012 rally forcing NUS President, Liam Burns, offstage (Sheriff, 2012a; Morgan, 2012b; Owen, 2012).

From the outset of the rally, planned as a focal point where speakers, including NUS president Liam Burns, could address the crowd, a group of approximately 100-150 demonstrators (Owen, 2012) comprising members of the ‘Imaginary Party’ initiate anti-NUS chants. One chant in particular came to dominate the latter stages of the

<sup>30</sup> Based on a term developed by the far-left French publication, *Tiqqun*. See: <http://libcom.org/library/these-imaginary-party>.

demonstration – both on the physical march (Author’s notes) and virtually on Twitter (Anticuts, 2012b; Albury, 2012a): “NUS, shame on you. Where the fuck have you brought us to?”

When Burns takes to the stage, however, the group of anti-NUS activists “turned up the volume and then stormed the stage” (See the entry at 15.13 in Owen, 2012). They heckle and throw fruit and eggs at the speakers and succeed in forcing Burns offstage requiring him to complete his speech via a megaphone in relative anonymity among the crowd (Hoyles, 2014). Claiming responsibility for these events, the ‘Imaginary Party’ tweet a series of anti-NUS statements outlining their intent to disrupt #Demo2012 and challenge the NUS’ narrative: “very happy to have taken the stage at #demo2012 - the NUS has only ever let us down. We expect nothing different going forward” (Imaginary\_Party, 2012) and “We hope you liked us on stage at #demo2012 - we love you comrades. The fight is only just beginning #nofees #nostudentdebt” (Imaginary\_Party, 2012).

By galvanising demonstrators’ disenchantment with the NUS after the organisation’s choice of a politically impotent destination for #Demo2012 and physically disrupting #Demo2012’s final rally, The Imaginary Party’s material practices succeed in undermining the NUS’s ability to effectively communicate its planned messages to demonstrators and media. More significantly, by using Twitter to produce and share its own media content in real-time (in contrast to the NUS’ hands-off approach to social media during the demonstration (Pool, 2014) as well as engage with other demonstrators directly, The Imaginary Party’s hybridised media actions become a defining factor in territorialising the #Demo2012 media assemblage against the NUS.

Gerbaudo (2012) suggests this online-offline hybrid collective action is best understood as " a process ... of spatial *assembling*, with its own specific choreography" (37) [emphasis in original]. Foregrounding the material, spatial logic at work within contemporary social movements, Gerbaudo critiques the technologically-enabled networks espoused by Manuel Castells (1996; Castells, 2009) and Jeff Juris (Juris, 2009) as overlooking the "emplaced nature" of protest and viewing the virtual, expressive “space of flows” as more significant than the physical “space of places” (Castells, 1996: 429 cited in Gerbaudo, 2012: 25).

Instead, Gerbaudo argues for an emphasis on examining the physical interactions of contemporary activism, particularly "choreographic leadership [...] a relatively centralised form of influence over the course a collective action will take" (Gerbaudo, 2012: 43). It can be argued that while the NUS organised #Demo2012 and attempted to choreograph and territorialise the emerging media assemblage to their agenda, the spontaneous eruption of sit-down protestors on Westminster Bridge and The Imaginary Party's activism exercise a much more hybridised, choreographic leadership which enabled a more effective creation of "a symbolic overlaying of physical space with cultural meanings and narratives" (*ibid*: 44). In turn, such actions and their effects become decisive in territorialising events and coding the #Demo2012 media frame emerging from the media assemblage.

### ***The Guardian's #Demo2012 Live-blog***

The ramifications of the physical environment and spatial practices on the territorialisation of the #Demo2012 media assemblage can be seen if we consider how the materiality of these choreographic processes generate symbolic media objects. Importantly, these objects are produced predominantly from the informal demonstration participants but then become enrolled into institutional news media coverage of the event further territorialising and coding the media assemblage against the NUS.

A central component in this choreography is the use of the live-blog media format by *The Guardian* newspaper. It will be helpful to discuss the specificities of this medium prior to its analysis. Live-blogs can be described as a form of hybrid media producing "live conversation[s] around a big story incorporating breaking news and verified facts with eyewitness material and audience opinion from social media channels" (Newman *et al*, 2012: 14). Thurman and Walters add further conceptual clarity by describing live-blogs as: "single blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period – anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours" (Thurman and Walters 2013, 83).

The adoption of live-blogs by institutional media organisations enables information gathering and production to respond to the dynamics of a digital media environment characterised by rapidly evolving communication structures consisting of heterogenous networks of formal as well as informal media actors producing news oriented around a complex 'information cycle' rather than the traditional top-down

approach to news (Chadwick, 2013). In this environment, narratively conventional news stories are superseded by stories that are oriented around the non-linear flows of digitally networked information (Manovich, 1999) generated by a range of formal and informal actors structured by the logic of databases (*ibid.*) and data streams (Manovich, 2012). As a result, live-blogging acts as a highly hybridised format for news organisations to make use of the "unstructured data, coming in fragments of raw, unprocessed journalism from both professionals and the public". By shifting journalistic practice towards "a more iterative and collaborative approach in reporting and verifying the news" (Hermida, 2012: 665) it can be argued that the live-blogs format is more dynamic and inclusive of alternative news sources when compared to other forms of institutional media.

Given these unique qualities it is also important to provide historical context to the origins of live-blogs and *The Guardian* as an institution. This is particularly significant as the *The Guardian* played a central role in the medium's development and, as a consequence, its form and function have been influenced by the organisation's legacy and evolution. *The Guardian* (originally *The Manchester Guardian*) was established as a daily newspaper in 1821 to promote liberal values following The Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, northern England.<sup>31</sup>

In order to ensure the newspaper's commercial viability and "secure the financial and editorial independence" and "safeguard the journalistic freedom and liberal values" of *The Guardian* its assets were transferred to The Scott Trust in 1936 (The Guardian, 2002). Crucially, the Trust continues to maintain *The Guardian* according to foundational values set out by early editor C.P. Scott. These include: "honesty; cleanness (today interpreted as integrity); courage; fairness; and a sense of duty to the reader and the community". Moreover, Scott asserted that "newspapers have 'a moral as well as a material existence'" (The Guardian, 2015).

Being able to maintain such public interest reporting and remain commercially viable has been a challenge throughout *The Guardian*'s history with the need to balance such a tension arguably requiring the organisation to innovate, typically by investing in its journalism, breaking big stories, adopting innovative marketing techniques and developing new products for readers (*ibid.*). The emergence of live-blogging was arguably one such innovative product developed by *The Guardian* in 1999 although

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<sup>31</sup> The Peterloo Massacre was the dispersion by armed militia of a peaceful pro-democracy demonstration held in Manchester, Northern England in 1819 which killed 11 people.



for its first eight years of use it was “was restricted mainly to live soccer and cricket coverage” (Thurman and Walters, 2013).

This changed, however, following the London bombings in 2005 where the live-blog format was adopted for reporting on rolling news coverage (*ibid.*) – a use which has since continued by the organisation. It is interesting to note, then, that despite the claims made by *The Guardian* and others that live-blogging enhances the quality and openness of media reporting through enabling transparency of sources, reader participation and an increased opportunity for a plurality of voices (Wells, 2011; Wilczek and Blangetti, 2017), the medium originally emerged from the newspaper’s sports reporting. This presents a new perspective on a seemingly radical media format, in that its function and format was honed in sports reporting, arguably a commoditised feature of news publishing, with high levels of popular and, thus, commercial appeal (Boyle, 2006; Newman, 2016). This adds an interesting economic materiality to the specificities of live-blogging as a medium which needs to be considered its analysis.

In *The Guardian*’s live-blog, the symbolic media content generated during the demonstration is organised and absorbed into the wider news agenda in close to real-time as #Demo2012 unfolds. This hybrid approach to news production gives *The Guardian* a competitive edge in terms of being the only formal news media able to gather and publish breaking news content. This is significant as it enables key moments in the demonstration to be rapidly identified and subsequently used as events for follow-up news stories – both by *The Guardian* and formal and informal media actors.

As a result, *The Guardian* is the first institutional news outlet to break the stage invasion story and focus wider media and public attention on “the growing anger towards the NUS among grassroots students” (Owen, 2012). Approximately an hour after *The Guardian*’s live-blog reporting of the rally, the first fully articulated news story appears in *The Guardian* (The Guardian, 2012b). Leading with mobile phone footage uploaded to the video-sharing platform YouTube (sourced by the live-blog) of hecklers at the rally, a detailed description of the stage invasion and inclusion of the chant dominating latter stages of the demonstration: “NUS, shame on you. Where the fuck have you brought us to” (*ibid.*).

In turn, this sets the news agenda for subsequent formal and informal symbolic media content production and distribution and within hours other news outlets run similar stories adopting the same angle, re-using *The Guardian*'s video footage and citing the anti-NUS chant. Coverage critical of the NUS and #Demo2012 appeared across both right and left-wing media, with *The Daily Mail* (Duell, 2012) and *The Independent* (Rawlinson, 2012) while *The Guardian* publishes an extended follow-up article reporting that the NUS president "Liam Burns, has been pelted with eggs and fruit at the conclusion of a march in London, which was marked by a low turnout and widespread anger over the perceived failure of the organisation to fight the trebling of university fees" (Malik and Ratcliffe, 2012). Of the immediate news coverage, only the BBC provides a post-event account of the demonstration which downplays both events at Parliament/Westminster Bridge and at the rally, merely reporting "[t]here was a small stand-off between protesters and police at Westminster. But the protest passed off peacefully, ending with a rally in Kennington" (BBC News, 2012a).

The significance of *The Guardian*'s live-blog in choreographing hybridised media behaviour and territorialising the #Demo2012 media assemblage is further reinforced in interview data from the NUS' media officer. Hoyles (2014) asserts that one of *The Guardian*'s live-blog journalists requested an interview with Liam Burns immediately after the egging. Despite giving a 15-minute interview, the journalist:

barely used any of it and wrote a very critical story about issues unrelated - [the stage invasion and general student anger towards the NUS] [...] and *The Guardian* continued to use it [...] despite it being an insignificant issue. I managed to talk it down with most people [...] for] the BBC it become a footnote in what they wrote about rather than a big thing. *The Guardian* surprised us, really, by running it (Hoyles, 2014)

This would suggest that the NUS' media formal management was effective in limiting the impact of the stage invasion with the BBC, *The Guardian*'s hybridised news-gathering and publishing articulated a counter-narrative further territorialising the media assemblage against the NUS.

Moreover, interview evidence revealed that the NUS continued to attempt to territorialise the assemblage using formal media management techniques post-demonstration. The NUS' Press Officer discussed how the organisation had briefed

journalists and placed an exclusive story with both *The Guardian* and *The Independent* to run after the demonstration (Hoyles, 2014). This story, featuring the NUS' proposal for a new system of post-graduate loans as a solution to the current, unsatisfactory fees arrangement, gained no further coverage beyond its exclusive placements despite offering a relevant follow-up story for the NUS' #Demo2012 narrative.

Crucially, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media content data shows that dominant themes emerging from the Demo2012 media assemblage is critical of the NUS, highlighting the political in-fighting among students and de-positioning the NUS as a credible policy-making organisation. These issues, driven by the informal media actors and hybridised media production practices of *The Guardian*'s live-blog ultimately choreograph the territorialisation and coding of the media assemblage, thus establishing the consistent media frame around the event.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion it can be argued that the four pillars of hybridity, materiality., choreography and coding developed in the analytical model can be identified throughout the empirical analysis of the Demo2012 case study. The following section will review where and how each pillar played a significant role in the (de)territorialisation of the codified media assemblage and ultimate production of the media frame.

In the initial stages of the case study, the NUS built hybrid relations between its own formal media actors and formal news reporters, more informal networks of affiliated actors, such as student reporters such and digitally-enabled supporters. Leveraging its economic material position and institutional status it was able to devote dedicated resources to create and choreograph media production. As a result, the NUS was able to effectively territorialise the media assemblage emerging early in the case study by ensuring a homogeneity of pro-NUS media content being produced and distributed.

Despite the NUS' effective hybridising of media actors and choreography of - largely formal – symbolic media content in the build-up to the demonstration, it is also possible to identify how a layer of material media objects also emerge within the media assemblage and introduce an ambiguity or tension potentially deterritorialising the NUS' efforts. For example, politically-charged material places and spaces, such

as Millbank and Whitehall – scenes of violence and property destruction in previous student demonstrations is overlaid on the symbolic media content produced. Although this rhetorical materiality is an integral part of the media content choreographed by the NUS, its symbolism arguably functions autonomously by simultaneously undermining the organisation’s aims of achieving a peaceful protest and potentially conveying a sense of empowerment for more radical student activists and demonstrators unwilling to take part in the NUS’ stage-managed ‘A to B’ march. Crucially, while such components of the media assemblage are not enough to fully deterritorialise the media assemblage significantly by increasing its heterogeneity, it does however, introduce a peripheral set of deterritorialising factors which will re-emerge during the demonstration with greater impact.

Once the demonstration gets underway and reaches the politically symbolic locations of Parliament Square and Whitehall, the materiality of space and place becomes a key determining factor in the communication and media object production around the event. Such spaces and their symbolism initiate a series of spatial practices. Firstly, demonstrators attempt to break through police lines into Parliament Square and while others initiate a sit-down protest that blocks the route of the demonstration forcing demonstrators back on Parliament. Empirical analysis of the symbolic media content being produced and shared by activists at this point in the case study confirms that such phenomena correlate with a quantitative increase in volume and a qualitative change in tone towards an anti-NUS position.

Such anti-NUS attitudes then become crystallised by the actions of an anti-NUS activist group, The Imaginary Party, which choreographs growing resentment towards the NUS among demonstrators by building hybrid relationships on the ground and online with participants by creating and distributing media content criticising the NUS. It then deploys spatial practices to disrupt the #Demo2012 rally – an intervention that forces the NUS’ president, Liam Burns, offstage and symbolically marks a critical endnote for the official demonstration. At this point in the case study, it can be argued that the media assemblage is becoming bifurcated with pro-NUS symbolic media content choreographed by the NUS’ formal media actors territorialising the media assemblage in support of its position and increasingly anti-NUS symbolic media content emerging from #Demo2012 participants, increasingly choreographed by informal networked media actors in order to deterritorialise the assemblage.

It is at this point that *The Guardian* newspaper's innovative live-blog draws together both the more formal hybrid networks established by the NUS with the more informal networks of #Demo2012 participants. By adopting techniques typified by digitally-networked media, such as reciprocal linking, curating raw, unverified information and participating in live, conversations with participants the live-blog enrolls the increasingly negative informal media content produced and shared by demonstrators. This functionality combined with *The Guardian*'s institutional agency and reputation as a credible media publisher begins to *re-territorialise* the media assemblage against the NUS. It is important to recognise, too, the economic materiality at play within the media assemblage here. *The Guardian*'s live-blog is highly dependent on the commercially-supported software developed by the organisation and operated by a range of professional reporters. While the live-blog's unique hybridised functionality is important in choreographing the resulting media actors and symbolic content, it is important to recognise the economic material elements supporting its ability to re-territorialise the media assemblage.

Analysis of the symbolic media content produced by the end of the demonstration and also in the days after the event demonstrates that *The Guardian* live-blog's enrolment and amplification of anti-NUS media content becomes embedded in the dominant media coverage of the event – both in formal, institutional and informal digital media. This re-territorialisation of the media assemblage - choreographed by the informal, networked media actors and amplified by *The Guardian*'s live-blog - begins to produce a highly territorialised assemblage which, in turn, is coded into the final media frame critical of the NUS and #Demo2012.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Empirical Case Study 2: Animal Rights Activists Versus Adidas**

On 21st November 2011 a group of European animal rights activists launched a targeted attack on corporate sponsors of the UEFA European Football Championships, Euro2012, due to take place in Poland and Ukraine the following year. The activists sought to draw the public's attention to news reports and NGO claims that the Ukrainian government was responsible for the mass killing of stray animals to 'clean up' its cities hosting high-profile football matches during Euro2012. Evidence gathered by animal rights activists suggested that, despite assurances by the Ukrainian government the programme of culling animals would cease in response to NGO demands, it continued with "dogs [...] tossed into giant incinerators" or being "fed food that has been laced with cheap chemicals that have caused them protracted suffering and ultimately death" (Osborn, 2011).

With the Ukrainian government resisting pressure from civil society actors, informal networks of online activists reacted to these reports by planning and implementing a digital campaign targeting Euro2012 sponsors. They did this primarily through the exploitation of social media's affordances for rapid and low-cost mobilisation of informal networks of online grassroots campaigners (Castells, 2009, xix-xx; Dencik & Leistert, 2015, 3-4). The activists focused on hijacking publicly visible digital spaces (although sponsors' highly popular and public branded Facebook pages were a primary target) with messages and content featuring graphic images of injured and dead animals to criticise sponsors' support for Euro2012. By implying the complicity of popular brands in the gruesome culling of animals, activists believed that the corporate sponsors would likely capitulate to their demands to put pressure on UEFA to take steps to stop the Ukrainian authorities.

Although activists targeted all of Euro2012's corporate sponsors, multinational sportswear manufacturer and retailer, Adidas, was made more visible in the ensuing crisis. This organisation received a much higher level of scrutiny and criticism than other sponsors and, consequently, was left with much greater damage to its reputation owing to the media assemblage that emerged. This chapter will analyse the animal rights activists' campaign, the way in which Adidas attempted to manage it and how, ultimately, the event unfolded into a reputational crisis for Adidas with the corporation finding itself solely "in the crossfire of [activist] indignation" (Meedia, 2011).

Specifically, the empirical analysis will investigate the production of symbolic media content by both the activists and Adidas, the hybridity of the activists' campaign and the ways in which material media objects choreograph the media assemblage – ultimately playing a decisive role of coding the assemblage and framing the event negatively towards Adidas.

Crucially, the chapter will suggest that while the role of formal and informal media actors, such as the animal rights activists and Adidas employees, managed the campaign/crisis in ways that are wholly consistent with effective online activism and crisis management, it is important to recognise that material media objects in the form of computational processes and algorithms played a central part in territorialising media assemblages and thus exerting media power.

### **Algorithmic visibility and sense-making**

Towards the end of 2011, the year preceding UEFA's Euro2012 European Football Championships being held in Ukraine and Poland, the media and animal rights NGO, PETA, reported that "thousands of animals [were] being slaughtered by order of the Ukrainian authorities" (Osborn, 2011). This was done in order to "clean up" both the physical environment of cities hosting Euro2012 football matches as well as the country's "tarnished image [...] to boost tourism and foreign investment" (*ibid.*). By early November 2011, this story had featured sporadically on news and social media in Europe (PETA, 2011) but despite intervention by the animal rights NGO, PETA, the issue still had not attracted public attention or forced UEFA or any of its corporate sponsors into action to address and resolve the situation.

In response to these news reports, animal rights activists formed a loosely connected online network centred on a campaign-specific Facebook page: 'Stop Killing Dogs – Euro2012 in Ukraine' (Facebook, 2011b) which functioned as the primary platform from which the activists planned and mobilised other animal rights activists across Germany, Austria and wider Europe. The aim of this network was to target UEFA's sponsors for Euro2012, including McDonalds, Continental, Coca-Cola, and the global sportswear retailer, Adidas (*ibid.*).

Before looking in greater detail at the ways that the activist campaign unfolded via Facebook, it is first useful to briefly discuss the origins and history of the platform to understand how this historical context potentially influences a contemporary reading



of the case study data. Facebook was created in 2004 by Harvard University Student, Mark Zuckerberg, as a social networking platform to replicate the traditional student directory format, including information and photographs of students (McGirt, 2007). The platform was opened to other, selected universities and schools internationally in 2005 and then to anyone over the age of 13 with a valid email address in 2006. By the end of 2006 Facebook had 12 million users actively using the platform each month (Boyd, 2018). Facebook's user growth continued rapidly and by 2009 has become the world's largest social networking platform with 132 million monthly users (*ibid.*). As of July 2018, Facebook has 2.23 billion monthly users (Reuters, 2018).

Although the platform's stated goal of "bring[ing] the world closer together" to build "meaningful communities" (Constine, 2017) is often understood as supporting positive or social ends, it can also be argued that the process of bringing people together is primarily a tool harnessed for commercial ends. Facebook originally, began life as a competing product to another Harvard-base social network (Carlson, 2010). However, some of the early functional developments to the platform in 2007 were designed to commercialise the site through the creation of business pages enabling businesses to promote themselves and market their products and services (Richmond, 2007). More significantly, in 2008 Facebook's new Chief Operating Officer, Sheryl Sandberg, began to develop new monetisation strategies for Facebook with advertising generated by user data key to this (Boyd, 2018).

Linked to this shift in Facebook's focus on monetisation through advertising came the need to deepen its relationship with users via their personal data in order to allow for more efficient and effective advertising services (Matsakis, 2018; Facebook, n.d.). In 2009 new features were rolled out for users including the 'Like' button allowing users to display preference for certain information posted to the platform (Adweek, 2009; Kincaid, 2009), followed by the '@' function allowing users to directly connect a post to a friend or other user (Rao, 2009). Such developments marked a shift in the platform's functionality from one where users simply updated their friends to one whereby they have a greater ability to share directional information about particular pieces of information. A further update to the Facebook 'Timeline' (later, 'Newsfeed') where users publish and consume content helped to organise this information chronologically based on a number of variables using a proprietary algorithm (White, 2011). Based on this historical content, then, it is

possible to observe that the social connectivity of Facebook has long been intertwined with its commercial aims. The significance of these potentially conflicting motivations in shaping specific features and outcomes of Facebook as a medium is discussed later in the chapter.

Given Facebook's commercial adoption, it can be argued that targeting corporate sponsors in order to exert public and financial pressure on organisations is an appropriate activist strategy (Crary, 2013). Moreover, the speed and efficiency with which activists can identify and choreograph online activists to draw public attention to high-profile corporations is a recent phenomenon termed "insurgent politics" (Castells, 2009: 300-303). Thus, as November progressed the activists became increasingly coordinated using social media to publicise and choreograph an "hour of protest" against the Euro2012 sponsors' Facebook pages for 20:00 on the evening of Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November, (Anis, 2011).

In the 24 hours preceding the allotted time a message began circulating around animal rights forums and email lists issuing clear instructions to activists:

from today [20<sup>th</sup> November, 2011] at 20:00 visit this page:  
<https://facebook.com/Stop.Killing.Dogs.EURO2012>. [H]ere it is explained how everything is supposed to run: you'll get from us a list of links to the sites to be attacked and multi-lingual templates, images and links that can be posted (Link, 2012)

At 8:00pm activists started posting messages and graphic images to sponsors' Facebook pages highlighting the Ukrainian city authorities' actions. As per the protest organiser's original message the activists' content was designed to "clearly tell the sponsors and donors, [that] we believe the animal killings are financed with their resources" (*ibid.*). Ultimately, the activists' aim was to "call on sponsors and UEFA to intervene and end the killing" (Schmitt, 2011).

As noted already, one distinct advantage of this digitally-enabled digital activist campaign against corporate sponsors was the ease and speed with which the campaign spread and, more importantly, the replicability of the campaign actions outlined in the organiser's original message. In this case, the organisers deployed two planned activist tactics which ensured the campaign achieved a significant advantage

over the Euro2012 sponsors at the outset of the campaign. Firstly, the “hour of action” was strategically planned by activists in order to maximise the campaign’s impact by exploiting the always-on nature of social media. Although social and digital media platforms are available at all times, it is not the case that corporations using such platforms have adapted their own routines to match these new always-on dynamics. As such, many corporate social media pages and channels are not staffed outside of working hours – an organisational flaw that can be exploited by activists.

By launching their campaign on a Sunday evening, activists targeting sponsors’ Facebook pages could be confident that it was unlikely the communication managers for the Euro2012 sponsors would be actively monitoring and managing their pages (Lloyd & Toogood, 2014). This approach is confirmed by interview data with Adidas’ client relationship manager. She asserts that activist campaigns regularly exploited this organisational vulnerability: “attacks on sponsors happened over the weekend because they knew the brand team wasn’t there [...] that was always the case” (McCarthy, 2015).

The choreographing of activists to target Adidas with an “hour of action” worked effectively as the organisation first noticed its page had been targeted and hijacked by activists on the morning of Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November (Author’s notes). As a result, Adidas (and other Euro2012 sponsors’) Facebook pages were “flooded with protest comments from Sunday evening [...] demand[ing] the withdrawal as a sponsor from the European Championships.” (Liller, 2011). Additionally, such an approach further ensured that the symbolic content posted by activists would be the first messages seen by sponsors’ Facebook fans if they accessed the brand’s Facebook page over the weekend or first thing on the Monday morning (McCarthy, 2015). As a consequence, the available evidence suggests that at the outset of the campaign the media assemblage being created around the issue is being territorialised in favour of the activists’ aims.

However, even at this early stage of the campaign it can be argued that the activists’ choreographed actions didn’t achieve the fully desired impact on Adidas’ Facebook fanbase or online supporters that was intended. Already, material media objects in the form of algorithms controlling Facebook’s primary datastream, its News Feed<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Facebook’s Newsfeed is a “constantly updating list of stories in the middle of your [Facebook profile’s] home page” (Patterson, 2015).

had started to play a role in influencing the visibility of the activists' campaign (Facebook, 2015c). Specifically, the algorithm deployed to manage Facebook's Newsfeed, termed the Edgerank algorithm (Patterson, 2015) is responsible for selecting and ordering what content is posted to users' News Feeds – both from individual users and corporate or brand pages.

While the exact criteria determining the Edgerank function are commercially protected, it is broadly recognised that it operates as a complex sorting algorithm (Oremus, 2016). For every Facebook user the Edgerank algorithm is designed to order – or sort – the News Feed posts according to a numerical value assigned to each one. As noted above, however, Edgerank is actually a series of inter-related algorithms. The 'sort' is performed by a further arrangement of algorithms, which determine a 'relevancy score' for each post. This is a much more complex series of tasks which aim to predict likely relevance of Facebook posts according to "hundreds" of individual attributes (*ibid.*).

Crucially, one of these attributes down-weights the visibility of News Feed content originating from branded Facebook pages in order to meet user demand. Facebook suggests that this is because "users [want] to see more stories from friends and Pages they care about, and less promotional content" (Facebook, 2015b). The result of such a change to Facebook's Edgerank algorithm is a consistent decline in visibility of Facebook Page content to individual users (Constine, 2014; DeMers, 2015). Study methodologies and results vary, but one comprehensive analysis of 50,000 posts from 1,000 Facebook pages suggests that content posted to branded or organisation pages is only seen in personal News Feeds by six per cent of the total fans of a page on average (Wittman, 2014). Other studies suggest this figure can be as little as two per cent and as high as 12 per cent depending on the size of page communities (Cooper, 2013).

Fundamentally, such evidence points to a situation whereby the majority of information shared via organisations' Facebook pages is unlikely to be seen by individual users of the platform – even when they are 'fans' of the corporate Facebook page. This situation is confirmed in interview data with Adidas's client relationship manager who asserts:

[Adidas] executives were freaking out because they could see what was on

the [Facebook] wall [i.e. News Feed] – but what people didn't understand was they could see 100s of comments on the wall [...] but if you understand the Edgerank algorithm, only a few people can see it [activists' campaign content] [...] you have to be going onto the wall to see it – [and] the percentage of people doing that is minuscule (McCarthy, 2015)

This statement highlights two important points that have a central relevance to the case study's media assemblage. Firstly, it can be argued that Facebook's Edgerank algorithm exerts a material non-human agency in rendering the activists' media content less visible despite their attempts to strategically plan the campaign in order to maximise its impact. This can be understood as a form of choreography in that the algorithm coordinates and organises how visible information is and thus influencing the potential actions arising. As Gerbaudo has noted: in networked environments media organises actors as part of an emergent process, rather than the other way around (Gerbaudo, 2012: 139).

Additionally, it reveals Adidas' executive management as not having a full understanding of the way the Edgerank algorithm influences the visibility of the Facebook page content, which in turn can be understood as an institutional weakness. This is important as it presents a situation whereby an international corporation with significant economic material resources and institutional agency capable of appointing a specialist consultancy to support its management of activism, is organisationally out-flanked (Clegg, 1989) by a computational process. As a result, despite the limited impact of the activists' campaign, Adidas' management perceived the Facebook page hijacking as a significant risk to the organisation's reputation and operation.

Thus, despite the reality of the activists' campaign achieving limited visibility, Adidas' executives' concern about the potential impact of the campaign remained and a conference call was convened between Adidas' social media manager at its head office in Germany and the organisation's communications agency in London to discuss how this crisis should be managed.

Before analysing the approach adopted by these actors, and the effect this had on deterritorialising the media assemblage's support for the animal rights activists, it's

useful to provide some historical background for Adidas in order to gain a better context of some of the decisions taken and outcomes identified in the case study data.

Adidas is a multinational business which manufactures sports shoes, clothing and accessories. Founded in 1924 – originally as Dassler Brothers – by brothers Adi and Rudolf Dassler, the current incarnation of the Adidas corporation originates in 1949 after the two brothers’ relationship deteriorated. The business is now the second biggest sportswear manufacturer in the world. (Adidas, n.d.). Adidas’ early commercial success originated from its innovative development of spiked running shoes and – significantly, its use of four-gold medal winning US athlete, Jesse Owens, to act as a high-profile endorser of the product during the 1936 Summer Olympics held in Berlin. This use of ‘celebrity’ customers, combined with its creation of distinctive logo, are responsible for helping to create the modern ‘sports industry’ (Smit, 2007).

Due to this marketing-based growth, it can be argued that Adidas’ commercial success is closely aligned to its presentation and reputation. The Dassler brothers’ links to the Nazi Party during the Second World War and their factory’s use for weapons manufacturing, for instance, are not widely discussed in official historical accounts of the business (Blickenstaff, 2017). Similarly, the business has been criticised for its poor labour conditions, lack of attention to animal rights and failure to tackle its carbon emissions (Robertson, 2017). It is this combination of Adidas’ high profile and concern for its reputation with often controversial issues that arguably made Adidas as an organisation acutely aware of the importance of managing the activists’ campaign as efficiently as possible.

Following discussion with Adidas executives and its social media manager, the specialist consultancy appointed a team to develop an approach to the crisis designed to limit reputational damage to the brand and prevent an escalation of the situation (McCarthy, 2015). Specific actions taken included: putting on hold creating and publishing any new symbolic media content to Adidas’ Facebook page. This was designed to ensure that no unrelated corporate information or promotional content would be published on social media by Adidas during the activists’ campaign. This would likely exacerbate the crisis by implying that Adidas was ignoring activists’ criticisms and remained focused on marketing its products despite the wider issues dominating the public agenda (*ibid.*). Importantly, the materiality of space and place played a significant role here in supporting Adidas’ response to the unfolding crisis. A ‘war-room’ was established in a meeting

space within the consultancy's office which was used through-out the crisis. This allowed rapid and effective, face-to-face communication by the consultancy team which, arguably, enabled the team to work efficiently in respond to the activists' campaign (Author's notes).

Next an analysis of the scale and potential impact of the crisis was undertaken by the consultancy's research division. McCarthy (2015) notes that the research team was enlisted to review data from across online media and social networks in order to assess how widely the issue was being spread and how influential the individuals participating in the campaign were and thus what was the likelihood of its further spread. The aim of this task was

to illustrate how few people could see this [the animal rights campaign] ... [our] biggest role was to calm them [Adidas management] down using research allowing them to make decisions (McCarthy, 2015)

As McCarthy suggests, this due diligence intelligence gathering was arguably the most significant task undertaken in the initial stages of the crisis. Such an approach was further supported by Adidas' social media manager during the crisis who asserted in interview that he holds a strong belief "in data being the foundation of planning comm[unication]s campaigns" (Heising, 2015) in digital environments.

Conducting due diligence research arguably helped the agency and Adidas determine the scale and significance of the activists' campaign by assessing the spread of the issue (i.e. was it being discussed across multiple social media platforms or just Facebook?) as well as gauging the influence of individual actors taking part (i.e. were there highly connected individuals engaging with the campaign making it more likely to spread faster). It also enabled the measurement of awareness and attitudes towards the issue in the wider networked public sphere (i.e. was this a popular topic of discussion, or merely contained to a minority of digitally-enabled animal rights activists) (Robinson, 2015).

Significantly, however, such research further demonstrates the centrality of algorithms as a material media object in shaping the emerging media assemblage. That is, as the campaign was primarily planned and deployed within and via digital networks the activists' actions produced a range of varying qualitative and quantifiable "digital traces" (Preis, Moat, Bishop, Treleaven, & Stanley, 2013;

Welser, Smith, Fisher, & Gleave, 2008) that can be tracked and analysed. Such traces are routinely gathered for identification and analysis by analytical software tools which make use of publicly available “big data” generated by the digital communication platforms used by activists’ and others’ groups active in the networked public sphere (Ampofo et al., 2015; Collister, 2013; Olsen, 2012).

Central to the identification, collection, analysis and subsequent visualisation of these digitised ‘big data’ sources, the software platforms necessarily rely on algorithms and a range of associated computational processes. As a result, it can be argued that algorithms play a vital role in the “sense-making” - interpretive – process (Heide, 2009; Walker, 2009). For example, an essential first stage in the analysis of digital data is the availability of ‘clean’ data – that is: digital datasets free from duplicate sources or, more importantly, ‘spam’ data.<sup>33</sup> The methods applied for de-duplicating and ‘de-spamming’ digital data by software providers vary depending on their proprietary systems but are based primarily on recognising and removing language and content deemed to be indicative of spam (Shafiqh Aski and Khalilzadeh Sourati, 2014).

In this approach, references to relevant keywords or phrases, such as Viagra, sex or ‘making money’ are detected by search algorithms and combined with machine-learning algorithms that identify new types of spam and the language used [to indicate spam] (*ibid.*). While the design and application of these computational processes is ostensibly to ensure high-quality, commercially viable datasets there nevertheless arises important questions about how the creation algorithmically of blacklists of words and websites can subsequently influence the analysis of data and the resulting ‘sense-making’ efforts.

The potential impact such underlying algorithmic processes may have had on the management of Adidas’ response to the activist campaign is acknowledged by both the communication agency and Adidas. Adidas’ social media manager during the crisis acknowledged that “insights gained from data mining tools depend heavily on how you ‘feed the machine’ to begin with. I am very aware that there are ways you can come to different results starting with the same question but using different algorithms to get to the answer” (Heising, 2015). The agency’s head of research and insight offered a more detailed assessment of the algorithmic processing of data: “[t]ypically,” when conducting research:

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<sup>33</sup> Spam refers to either ‘digital detritus’ of abandoned websites or the intentional exploitation of digital content to sell commercial products in an aggressive way that ‘pollutes’ useful or authentic digital information.



we look into the coverage [of the software]. [We ask] where is data coming from and how much are we getting? It is especially important in a crisis that we are not missing anything. A second consideration is is the [software] eliminating spam? Different tools do it differently and will give different volumes for the same [search] terms depending on their spam filter (Robinson, 2015)

However, while such questions are asked by the communication agency's researchers, Robinson also suggests that the availability of information about software platform's underlying algorithms can be hard to acquire: "We don't have full visibility [of the algorithms] - it's a bit of a dark art - not having access to the full [algorithmic] process." (*ibid.*). Such secrecy results primarily from the commercial sensitivity of software vendors who consider the algorithms powering their technology as proprietary intellectual property. As such, the ability to fully interpret and understand how algorithms influence the gathering and processing of digital big data is severely limited by economically-driven commercial priorities of software.<sup>34</sup>

Regardless of these limitations, such software is widely adopted within corporate communications teams and agencies and, according to the agency's head of research and insight, is used routinely to track and monitor public behaviour in order to gain a better quantitative and qualitative understanding of the dynamics of the networked public sphere (Robinson, 2015). Specific applications highlighted include: understanding public attitudes towards clients or related topics; measuring the size of given population groups with specific interests and identifying behavioural patterns among a given population to infer potential future actions (*ibid.*).

More significantly, analysis software is also used to apply certain filters to the resulting data in order to identify additional factors such as categorising and segmenting audience groups according to social and cultural phenomena, including perceived influence in a given context (i.e. the potential ability to initiate the wider spread of information across digital media through their networked connections), gender, age and geographic location. Some tools even claim the ability to apply

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<sup>34</sup> For a range of possible opportunities potentially enabling academic researchers to gain access to commercially protected algorithms, see: Pasquale (2011).

algorithmic processing to big data to ascertain family status, religion and earnings (Ha, 2013).

The ultimate purpose of such analysis, Robinson suggests, is to “paint a picture of how the target audience behaves in and out of social [media]” (Robinson, 2015). Thus, the materiality of media objects and the role of algorithms in detecting and tracing them are important as they enable the consultancies’ formal actors to understand the ways in which the activists’ campaign was unfolding. This intelligence in return could be used to develop a plan to either help Adidas territorialise the media assemblage in its favour or otherwise seek to deterritorialise the activists’ choreography of the media assemblage (*ibid.*). This demonstrates that while algorithmic processing of digital data enables strategic communication practitioners to undertake much more detailed analyses of their communicative environment, they are also deferring such sense-making and interpretation activities to computational processes. Algorithms, according to Berry, are responsible for converting “real-world situations into *discrete* processes to undertake a particular [...] task.” (Berry, 2011) [emphasis in original].

Moreover, these computational processes are crucial for an understanding of how reality is mediated. Berry argues:

The key point is that without the possibility of discrete encoding there is no object [i.e. real-world event] for the computational device to process. However, in cutting up the world in this manner, information about the world necessarily has to be discarded in order to store a representation within the computer. In other words, a computer requires that everything is transformed from the continuous flow of our everyday reality into a grid of numbers that can be stored as a representation of reality which can then be manipulated using algorithms. These subtractive methods of understanding reality (episteme) produce new knowledges and methods for the control of reality (techne) (*ibid.*)

Algorithms, according to Berry, are vital to the rendering and shaping of reality in a digitally-driven society. As such, the material role played by algorithms becomes increasingly more powerful in shaping the information available to determine a

particular version of reality and, thus, influence the strategic decisions made by communication professionals.

As an empirical demonstration of the significance of such algorithmically-led decision-making analysis by Adidas' agency determined that the primary impact of the activists was largely contained within Facebook and the impact itself was significantly limited by Facebook's own Edgerank algorithm. Therefore, there was little dissemination of relevant information through wider online networks and no engagement with the campaign by influential individuals capable of escalating the issue's visibility on to the wider public agenda. Based on these insights, the decision was made not to engage with the activists immediately and to wait and see if the campaign dissipated of its own accord (McCarthy, 2015).

### **Algorithmic hyperintermediation and Auto-Moderation as catalysts for coding**

In parallel with the algorithmic analysis of the activists' digital data traces and Adidas' corporate affairs department was also producing an official response to the crisis issue. This would be published to the Adidas Facebook page in order to publicly demonstrate the corporation was taking activists' concerns seriously. This official statement was eventually approved and published on the Adidas Facebook page at 22:37 on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011:

We'd like to acknowledge and respond to the questions about our position on the issues surrounding animal welfare in the Ukraine and how that relates to adidas' [sic] partnership with the UEFA EURO 2012. We want you to know that the adidas [sic]group strongly opposes animal cruelty and expects the Ukrainian Government to investigate these allegations carefully and take appropriate measures. We are monitoring the topic closely and are committed to continue to do so (Adidas, 2011)

Although an official statement had now been issued to attempt to deterritorialise the activists' territorialised media assemblage, this choreographic move was quickly disrupted by several new problems emerging from the unique dynamics and infrastructure of the digitally-networked media environment. These problems arguably catalysed the crisis and tipped the balance in favour of the activists. Most significantly, they influenced a heavily territorialised media assemblage which in

turn created the coded media frame against Adidas. Crucially, both of these events can be attributed to the material function of the algorithms embedded within the digital research platforms and, more importantly, Facebook itself.

Firstly, despite Adidas' well-researched and strategically planned decision to not engage the activists immediately, the failure to issue an immediate response via the Facebook page was in fact interpreted by the activists and wider media observers as an unwillingness to engage with the issue – a development that later played an important role in the critical interpretation of Adidas' handling of the activists' campaign (Meedia, 2011; Gillich, 2011b; Velt, 2011). This can be interpreted as Adidas' inability to engage with informal media actors and build hybridised networks due to its institutional limitations in operating as a bureaucratic and risk averse corporation.

Secondly, as has been noted above, Facebook's Edgerank algorithm significantly limited the visibility of activists' messages to the small number of Adidas' Facebook 'fans' who directly visited the page. However, the planned choreography by the activists to flood Facebook pages with campaign content was effective in undermining Adidas' official statement. While, Adidas was holding-off issuing its official response, activists started choreographing their networks to continuously bombard Adidas' Facebook page with negative symbolic content. Thus, the corporation's attempt to deterritorialise the activists' media assemblage was limited in impact.

Specifically, activists had created a template message which activists were encouraged to 'copy and paste' on Adidas and other Euro2012 sponsors' Facebook page. Importantly, the materiality of a computational process such as 'copy and paste' is further significant technological affordance as it allows rapid replication of digitised information which can be shared freely at scale. As a consequence, Adidas' single post of its corporate statement was quickly diluted by the deluge of activists' comments on the Facebook page rapidly ensuring that Adidas' official crisis response was "seldom to be found in the flood of complaints" (Liller, 2011). Thus, it can be argued that this material layer of the activists' symbolic media content plays an equally important role in enabling the territorialisation of the media assemblage in the activists' favour.

Such a tactic has been identified by Morozov (2012) as “hyperintermediation” where online actors use algorithms to identify relevant information – such as pro-democracy debates or corporate marketing or public relations campaigns - circulating within the networked public sphere. With target campaigns identified algorithmically-powered ‘bots’<sup>35</sup> are instructed to produce high volumes of irrelevant or oppositional content which is disseminated rapidly through digital networks in order to disrupt the digital debates or information flows. Such a tactic is not necessarily a constructive one. As Morozov argues: “persuasion may not be the goal. Some bots exist only to make it harder to discover timely factual information about, say, some ongoing political protests” or they are designed and deployed to “overwhelm [...] popular hashtags with useless information” (Morozov, 2012).

Such tactics, here deployed by the activists against Adidas and other Euro2012 sponsors, can be understood as one component of what can be termed a ‘non-representational’ approach to media. For instance, while the symbolic content produced is representative of an issue at a surface level, the aim of the content is to produce a material effect on a digital platform’s computational, algorithmic function, rather than to exert a representational or phenomenological response by a human.

This arguably presents a further materiality layer of the media objects being produced and distributed by the activists. For example, the messages shared among activists and posted to Adidas’ Facebook page are created purely to trigger a material response by an algorithm that deprioritises Adidas’ corporate statement rendering it invisible to viewers of the fan page. This is in opposition to conventional, symbolic media, which is designed to establish a mutual or communicative, persuasive understanding based on textual or visual symbolic meaning (Perloff, 2010).

Although such an approach is adopted by the activists, it is also acknowledged as playing a role in Adidas’ approach to digital media. Adidas’ global social media manager, Mark Heising, argues that as an organisation, its digital communication strategies take into account factors affecting the interaction between their communicative content and algorithms, such as Edgerank and Google PageRank which can influence the visibility of content. Understanding the impact of such

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<sup>35</sup> Bots can be understood as “software agents which perform automated tasks” (Koike & Nishizaki, 2013) – often with much greater velocity and at volume compared to human users.

computational processes on media, Heising suggests, is “a means to optimise content delivery and maximise reach” but does not necessarily “define the sort of story we want to tell” (Heising, 2015). Ultimately, then, non-representational media tactics are adopted primarily to create and disseminate content solely to interact with and generate a material, computational result, not a symbolic, persuasive outcome. While it should be noted that although such tactics indirectly cause an effect on the representation of issues by shaping their visibility, this is not the primary motivating factor.

Furthermore, the final and most decisive moment in the case study which creates a highly territorialised, homogenous media assemblage in favour of the activists arises as a result of the computational processes operating within Facebook. Having assessed the potential impact of the activists’ campaign and finally published a corporate statement on its Facebook page, there was an expectation by Adidas its response to the crisis would de-escalate and limit the activists’ choreographed campaign and deterritorialise the media assemblage back towards a more balanced position (CIPR, 2015). Due to the dynamics and autonomy of Facebook’s algorithms operating within the assemblage, however, the crisis was already transforming into a more problematic situation for Adidas. In addition to the activists’ original criticism of Adidas’ involvement with Euro2012, a new – and highly damaging - criticism was emerging: censorship of activists’ voices.

At around midday on 21<sup>st</sup> November comments were being posted by activists on the Adidas Facebook page claiming that activists’ posts, as well as new comments being added by activists to existing posts on the page, were being deleted and therefore censored, by Adidas (Author’s notes; McCarthy, 2015). For organisations that proactively use social media to communicate with the public, the need for corporate transparency and openness are paramount (McMichaels, 2012). This is largely in relation to the differing values that exist between formal, professional media actors and informal, digitally-enabled media actors. This distinction is primarily premised on the divide between economic motivations and social ones (Benkler, 2006). When these two motivations become hybridised then risks emerge which may lead to misunderstanding between the different groups of actors (McMichaels, 2012). As a result, frameworks or internal policies guiding formal institutional actors in their engagement and relationships with informal media actors become useful organisational tools (*ibid.*).

Adidas, seen as a leading corporate adopter of social media marketing (Tödtmann, 2011), details its corporate commitment to such principles in their ‘Social Media Guidelines’ and social media ‘house rules’. These documents echo the values of socially-motivated media by stressing Adidas’ support for “open communication” (Adidas, 2011a). Furthermore, they encourage the public to “come and join the conversation, connect with other people and have fun sharing your thoughts and ideas” (Adidas, n.d.). As such, accusations that Adidas was actively censoring discussion on its Facebook page by deleting or removing comments posted by the activists goes against the normative values of institutional participation in digitally-enabled, hybrid media networks (McMichaels, 2012). Moreover, given the historical importance of Adidas’ need to manage its reputation – both in terms of its commercial success and problematic corporate origins - being seen as anti-social and undemocratic are far from ideal.

This new scenario represented a serious development for Adidas as part of the ongoing reputational crisis. In order to address this development an internal investigation was urgently initiated by Adidas and its agency to ascertain which employees had access to the Facebook page and were responsible for deleting activists’ comments (Author’s notes). After an internal investigation lasting several hours it was confirmed that no individual Adidas or agency employee was responsible for deleting activists’ posts and comments on Facebook. Moreover, further investigation uncovered that the missing content was being ‘censored’ by Facebook’s “auto-moderation” and “profanity filter” functionality without any knowledge of the agency or brand (Adidas, 2011b). Once again, this highlights how the technological materiality of media objects continue to play a central role in the territorialising of the media assemblage.

Facebook’s auto-moderation function is an algorithmic tool programmed to detect a number of undesired variables, such as profane language; other pre-determined trigger words and phrases in a similar process to the detection of offensive content adopted by digital research and analytics tools discussed above. It also operates by looking for a range of indicators that a Facebook page is being ‘spammed’ – that is targeted by individual users or computer programmes designed to publish offensive, irrelevant or promotional material.

This is achieved through the automated detection of patterns of identical content being posted to a page; the velocity with which this content is being posted is also taken into consideration (Facebook, 2015a). When these patterns of communication are positively identified, Facebook responds by automatically holding the suspected posts or comments unpublished in a secure ‘spam folder’ which prevents the message from being displayed (*ibid.*). Once the unpublished messages have been reviewed by the administrator of the page they can be published or deleted depending on their true status.

In Adidas’ case, activists’ use of offensive language in some of their messages triggered Facebook’s anti-profanity filter; at the same time the activists’ centrally coordinated campaign tactic of sharing a copy and paste template message for posting on Adidas’ page is likely to have activated Facebook’s auto-moderation algorithms as it (falsely) identified the activists’ campaign content as ‘spam’ based on the patterns of their media production and distribution. It is notable here that Facebook’s auto-moderation algorithm is responsible for exerting a non-human agency beyond the activists and Adidas in order to ‘censor’ online discourse. This acts as a choreographic function within the media assemblage in its own right. For instance, as with the hyperintermediation of Adidas’ official statement discussed earlier, Facebook’s auto-moderation of spam or offensive content operates non-representationally. That is, rather than by seeking to understand the representational dimensions of the symbolic media content it functions by seeking to computationally recognise patterns of text and communicative behaviour.

Additionally, as a consequence of such non-representational processes Facebook then applies its own automated decision-making to block representational content. Such non-human agency, ironically, is designed by Facebook to protect brands from potentially damaging online content. However, in this case the unseen and material elements of Facebook’s algorithmic processes exacerbated the damage to Adidas’ brand reputation by triggering wider, more hybridised networks of formal and informal media actors to scrutinise the crisis. In turn, this critical attention catalysed the territorialisation of the media assemblage against Adidas, back in favour of the activists.



## **The Adidas “shitstorm”**

In terms of media coverage of the activists’ campaign, while this coordinated “hour of action” on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November arguably contributed to a “social media spectacle” (Greye, 2011b) against Euro2012 sponsors and generated official responses condemning the Ukrainian government’s actions, it can be argued that the real impact on the corporate brands was forced not by the formulaic activist campaign, but by the unforeseen effect of algorithms and computational processes operating within Facebook itself.

Although sponsors’ Facebook pages were being targeted with between hundreds (Casabianca, 2011; InMaDa, 2011; Sandrah87, 2011) and thousands (Greye, 2011b) of critical posts between 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November, the wider visibility and impact of this activity was limited by Facebook’s Edgerank algorithm, as discussed earlier. Analysing the wider symbolic content being produced as part of the activists’ campaign indicates that only 22 relevant tweets were generated in relation to the campaign. This represents a largely insignificant outcome for a campaign aiming to generate widespread public awareness of the issue and force UEFA and its sponsors to take action as a result of high-profile reputational damage within the public sphere.

Significantly, analysis of the Twitter content and institutional media data from the campaign reveals that the majority of symbolic content critical of sponsors occurs between 21<sup>st</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011, that is the period in which the activists’ digital campaign has already started to dissipate. From the available evidence this increased impact of the campaign appears to be down to two factors. Firstly, the data suggests an increased hybridity of the media actors involved in the media assemblage. While the initial campaign was coordinated and deployed using Facebook, from the 21<sup>st</sup> November further media actors become enrolled in the assemblage – both informal actors, such as bloggers and formal media actors, such as journalists - discover and start to choreograph the story.

Secondly, the increased interest in the campaign leading to the enrolment of hybrid networks of actors is caused by a shift in focus of the story away from the activists’ campaign and towards Adidas’ failure to adequately manage the dynamic online protest - and the reputational damage this may cause to the business. In particular, the resulting coded media assemblage singles out and frames Adidas for

experiencing a social media “meltdown”<sup>36</sup> (Wirtschafts Woche, 2011) or “shitstorm” (Vip, 2011).

Based on analysis of the media content data collected for the case study, there is limited discussion of the crisis beyond Facebook on the evening of the campaign. What emerges is published by activists who post about the animal rights issue and asks questions whether Euro 2012 sponsors would like to be associated with the situation (Indenbirken, 2011; Greye, 2011a, 2011b). The emergence of a more defined choreography which catalyses the territorialisation of the media assemblage against Adidas can be observed in a blog post by media commentator, Bernd Gillich on 21<sup>st</sup> November. Gillich writes an analysis about the digital protest evolving around UEFA sponsors and offers guidance on how companies should manage such online activist tactics (Gillich, 2011b).

Crucially, Gillich is the first media commentator to use the term “shitstorm” to refer to the crisis – although two important points need to be made: firstly Gillich uses the term in reference to a range of corporate sponsors, not just Adidas, and secondly, the focus of Gillich’s blog post is not directly about the success of the activists’ campaign, rather it directs critical attention to the ways in which the corporate sponsors have reacted and managed the ensuing events. In the post Gillich asks: “How do Canon, McDonalds, Continental [Tyres] and Adidas [...] behave in such a social web crisis (“Shit Storm”)” (Gillich, 2011b). It is also interesting to note that a number of the informal media actors pushing the Adidas shitstorm angle are arguably asserting their own expertise in the situation in order to demonstrate their commercial suitability to companies likely to find themselves in similar circumstances. This represents a further, important material factor influencing the choreography and territorialisation of the media assemblage as a number of the informal actors engaged in this process appear to be operating according to economic, commercial motivations, rather than purely social ones.

However, it is also worth noting that analysis of how UEFA’s wider sponsors handled the activists’ campaign reveals that while some corporations are praised, Adidas is singled out for specific criticism: “Adidas hasn’t responded since Sunday

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<sup>36</sup> The term ‘meltdown’ is transliterated from the German term ‘GAU’, an abbreviation of ‘größter anzunehmender unfall’ that is used in media coverage of the crisis (see Meedia, 2011). The term itself literally translates as ‘worst case scenario’ but according to pme25 (2010) the term is colloquially used to refer to a serious nuclear disaster. Based on this context the term ‘social media GAU’ is understood to mean a ‘social media meltdown’.

night to the wall messages on their Facebook page” (Vip, 2011). In a follow-up blog post published later on 21st November Gillich remarks: “Adidas has responded after a whopping 30 hours [...] such social media crisis management is not part of the “Champions League” of companies on the social web” (Gillich, 2011b).

Following on from Gillich’s blog post, another article appears on the *VIP Room* blog published by the newspaper, *Nürnberger Zeitung*. Echoing the tone and terminology of Gillich’s post the author makes a more explicit link between the social media “shit storm” and Adidas. Firstly, the blog post’s title reads: “Social Media Giant in Shitstorm” while the opening paragraphs asserts that Adidas finds itself with a “raging shitstorm” on its Facebook page (Gillich, 2011b). As evidence for its criticism of Adidas, the author continues to cite the organisation’s delays responding to activists and the deletion of activists’ posts and comments – both events that can be directly connected with the materiality of Adidas’ organisation structure and Facebook’s algorithmic processing of information during Adidas’ management of the crisis.

From the ethnographic data collected it is possible to contextualise this public perception of Adidas’ actions as being primarily driven by the organisational processes and bureaucracy encountered in developing a response to the activists’ criticisms. For example, while initially Adidas paused to assess whether the situation would deescalate, the time taken for an appropriate response to be drafted by Adidas executives and to incorporate multiple rounds of revisions from internal stakeholders led to activists and other media actors questioning Adidas’ motivations. This scenario was further compounded by the need for Adidas’ specialist agency to ‘translate’ the final statement into language more suited to Facebook. As a consequence, the rapidly evolving dynamics of networked media, catalysed by quasi-autonomous Facebook algorithms, succeeded in outflanking Adidas, choreographing the media assemblage and territorialising it against the organisation.

It is apparent, then, that while all Euro2012 sponsors were targeted by animal rights activists, Adidas is singled out as the only sponsor attracting dedicated criticism by media actors and commentators in the media content data. With the link between Adidas’ perceived handling of the activist campaign and the ensuring reputational damage featuring prominently in coverage on 21<sup>st</sup> November, it can be argued that these articles play a significant role in territorialising and coding the media

assemblage against Adidas by establishing homogeneity across the interpretation of events.

This territorialisation of the media assemblage against Adidas is further reinforced by coverage appearing beyond the original campaign from 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> November. During this period national German media outlets, such as *Handelsblatt*, *Wirtschaftswoche*, *Die Welt*, *RTL* and *Stern*, and bloggers, continue to highlight Adidas' prominence in the crisis for its delay responding to activists and deleting and censoring comments. This culminates in repeated accusations that the brand itself is experiencing its own "shitstorm" (Gillich, 2011c) or "meltdown" (Vip, 2011) and "stands in the crossfire of [activist] indignation" (Meedia, 2011; Handelsblatt, 2011).

In the same period, a small flurry of 17 tweets appear reinforcing the same messages. Although not substantial in scale, the connection between the crisis and reputational damage to corporate sponsors is once more levelled primarily against Adidas. For example, the brand is the only sponsor highlighted in the content analysed: "On the basis of animal genocide in the Ukraine, I'm calling to boycott of all sponsors of EM2012 [...] #socialmedia #adidas Please #rt" (Liller, 2011); others reaffirm the "Shitstorm about Adidas" (Meedia, 2011) and "social media meltdown" (Gillich, 2011a). From an analysis of the media content data generated by the activists' original campaign and the broader media coverage of the crisis beyond Facebook, it can be argued that the media assemblage builds from an informal Facebook-driven campaign, criticising all Euro2012 sponsors, to a full-blown reputational crisis with the coded media assemblage territorialised by formal national media and informal social media actors on blogs and Twitter singling out Adidas for specific criticism of the way it handled the social media 'shit storm'.

By tracing the choreography of media actors in the case study we can see how in the early stages of the campaign Adidas and the activists produce and publish symbolic content countering each other's claims. Owing to the enrolment of Facebook's algorithms in the media assemblage the materiality of computation impacts the visibility of activists' and Adidas' media content, influencing the media assemblage's (de)territorialisation.

Specifically, Facebook's algorithmic auto-moderation of activists' content (rather than the planned intentions of the activists) catalyses the coding of the media

assemblage and translates it into a media frame. Additionally, Facebook's Edgerank algorithm significantly limited the visibility and impact of the activists' campaign and the communication agency's use of research software algorithms to analyse and assess the potential wider influence of the campaign both led to Adidas' delay in responding to activists. These algorithmically-driven decisions subsequently led to specific criticism of Adidas' handling of the campaign. Moreover, the initial reputational damage arising from Adidas' delayed response to activists was further exacerbated as a result of Adidas' 'censorship' of activists' content.

Again, this pivotal moment in the framing of the campaign arose from Facebook's auto-moderation algorithm hiding content believed to be spam as a result of the activists' non-representational communication tactics. Thus, it can be argued, that the media assemblage's territorialisation and coding in which Adidas is singled out for criticism as the primary Euro2012 sponsor enduring a 'shit storm' or 'meltdown' is primarily choreographed by the contingent algorithmic and computational processes operating within digital media.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of empirical evidence presented in this chapter shows that the case study confirms the emancipatory potential of digital media identified in *Chapter 2* for rendering digital activism "easier, faster, more spontaneous and ultimately more decentralised, horizontal and participatory" (Dencik & Leistert, 2015, 3). This view, however, can be contrasted with the critique of technology's inherent "progress-ism" (Chun, 2007). While social and digital media can make protest more effective on a number of levels, as Dencik and Leistert note: digital activists remain "continuously confronted with the restricting structures and limitations that are inherent in [social media] technologies" (Dencik & Leistert, 2015, 3).

Moreover, critically assessing social media protest, Leistert asserts that digital platforms are fundamentally "engineered to maximise advertising revenue and consumer consumption". Moreover, "the algorithms that shape this kind of social media interaction are steeped within a business model that is designed to target individual affect and cognition in order to sell advertisements" (Leistert cited in Dencik and Leistert, 2015: 4). Such algorithms, as Manovich has suggested, are at the heart of the material infrastructure of the twenty-first century digital media and

communications environment in the form of mediating datastreams (Manovich, 2012).

However, the findings of this chapter aim to move beyond a digital optimist-pessimist dichotomy of media power implied by Leistert (2015). Rather the chapter demonstrates an account of the complex ways in which social media can be deployed effectively by activists and corporate actors while at the same time influencing the effects of media at a material, infrastructural level through the algorithms operating within a campaign. Crucially, the evidence presented in this chapter challenges critical notions of digital media platforms by suggesting that algorithms developed in pursuit of commercial objectives do not necessarily favour the corporate exploitation of individuals, nor do they necessarily restrict or limit the impact of digital activism.

Responding to Leistert's argument that algorithms manipulate individuals' affective and cognitive experience for commercial ends it can be acknowledged that the animal rights activists in this case study neatly exploited the affective and cognitive opportunities afforded by Facebook to choreograph a widespread, distributed campaign against Adidas. Moreover, although it has been demonstrated that Facebook's Edgerank algorithm limited the potential visibility of the activists' campaign (McCarthy, 2015), it can be argued that the same algorithm produced a similar effect for Adidas when they posted their own official response to activists' claims. This holds Adidas to account to the same media effects as the activists and introduces the notion that as a material media object, Facebook's algorithms played a significant part in influencing the activists and Adidas' attempts to choreograph – and thus (de)territorialise and code the media assemblage into an enduring media frame.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Case Study 3: Empirical Analysis of *The Guardian*'s #AskSnowden Web Chat**

In June 2013, the UK's *Guardian* newspaper published a series of stories of international importance that generated a seismic shift in the way that the global public perceived the digital surveillance operations of the UK's Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) and the US's National Security Agency (NSA). As a consequence of *The Guardian's* investigations the UK and US intelligence services were forced to undertake radical changes to the way they functioned – partly in response to the disclosure of their methods and partly due to judicial decisions made in light of the revelations which suggested illegality (Ackerman & Roberts, 2014; Chadwick & Collister, 2014; Savage, 2013).

The series of investigative reports were the work of an international network of *Guardian* journalists and a 'whistleblower', Edward Snowden, who leaked extensive materials covering the size, scope and processes governing the interception of digital communications data. This included phonecalls to internet metadata of entire UK and US populations in an apparent "collect it all" strategy (Chadwick & Collister, 2014). According to Chadwick and Collister, *The Guardian's* self-styled 'Snowden Files' and 'NSA Files' were arguably "some of the most significant publications in the modern history of the American [and arguably, UK] security state" with both the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* (which also helped break the initial story) being awarded the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for public service journalism (*ibid*: 2422).

Without doubt, *The Guardian* newspaper – working closely with Edward Snowden – broke, shaped and defined the media frame surrounding The Snowden Files. This is no small achievement in the contemporary digital communications environment where media power increasingly appears to be located in the networked spaces of informal media actors. Here media frames and media agendas are influenced directly through the empowerment of citizen journalists (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004) or indirectly through complex and dynamic interactions with formal media actors (Chadwick, 2011). However, it can be argued that the innovative approach to news-making deployed by *The Guardian* during The Snowden Files stories enabled it to exert a contemporary form of media power. This meant *The Guardian* was able to choreograph the media objects at work in the case study in order to territorialise the Snowden Files media assemblage and code an enduring media frame around the story. This media power arguably emerges from the market-oriented economic and institutional position of *The Guardian* as a commercial media organisation, but crucially, also identifies and taps into the more diffuse, non-market power of digital



networks. In doing so, it can be argued that *The Guardian* strengthens its position as a formal news institution (and displays features of a contemporary form of media power) by leveraging the norms of the digital media environment typified by networks of grassroots, public-service oriented informal media actors.

Taking this argument as its starting point, this chapter will undertake a detailed assessment of the #AskSnowden story as it unfolded and was driven forward by *The Guardian* and networks of informal media actors. Although a number of recent studies have investigated how the Edward Snowden story was framed in terms of language (Madison, 2014; Salvo & Negro, 2015), its comparative reception in different countries (Salvo & Negro, 2015) and the differences between the story's portrayal across social and digital media (Qin, 2015), this chapter will use the empirical evidence gathered in the case study to test and validate the contemporary theory of media power developed in *Chapter 2*.

In answering these research questions, the chapter will explore whether *The Guardian's* strategic re-positioning as a dynamic, networked institutional news organisation enable it to function as a digitally-driven clearing house for powerful public interest journalism, building on the tentative model pioneered by Wikileaks (Chadwick and Collister, 2014: 2429; Benkler, 2011). It will also examine the specific ways in which *The Guardian* adopted and responded to the territorialising and deterritorialising dynamics of digital media networks while strengthening its institutional position to shape the ways in which the story was coded and framed – ultimately exerting media power.

This analysis will be addressed through an examination of the symbolic and material components and processes deployed by *The Guardian* and the digitally networked actors enrolled in the media assemblage around the story. Specifically, the chapter will undertake a content analysis of *The Guardian's* #AskSnowden initiative. This was an exclusive web chat that enabled the public to question Edward Snowden using a purpose-built live-blog hosted on *The Guardian's* website. A dedicated Twitter hashtag was also established and promoted by *The Guardian*. This analysis will explore how networks of informal media actors were enrolled into *The Guardian's* formal news-gathering and editorial processes and investigate the economic and technological affordances operating within the #AskSnowden web chat. The results of this analysis will aim to determine to what extent the content

produced and shared by the digitally-networked actors aligned with the coded #AskSnowden media frame produced and distributed in *The Guardian*'s reporting.

### ***The Guardian*, digitally-networked journalism and media power**

Locating *The Guardian*'s creation and use of the #AskSnowden web chat as a central element of the reporting of the Edward Snowden leaks requires us to understand the historical context in which the newspaper's reporting should be assessed. It is also important to recognise its place in, and response to, any commercial and ideological renewal of news-making institutions that has occurred.

Originally established in Manchester, in the north of England in 1821 following The Peterloo Massacre<sup>37</sup>, *The Guardian* (originally *The Manchester Guardian*) has, since its origins, been recognised as a media institution championing "journalistic freedom and liberal values" (The Guardian, 2002). Central to upholding these values has been the news organisation's editorial independence, in turn closely linked to its financial independence. One of the newspaper's early editors, C. P. Scott, asserted the belief that "newspapers have 'a moral as well as a material existence'" (The Guardian, 2015). However, balancing the demands of these two factors has proven difficult through-out *The Guardian*'s history with externalities such as a highly competitive media industry and declining media readerships, as well as an, at times, "naive" approach to business (The Guardian, 2002). As a result, *The Guardian* has consistently adopted a variety of tactics to "secure the financial and editorial independence" of the newspaper in order to "safeguard [its] journalistic freedom and liberal values" (The Guardian, 2002).

One of the first attempts to address these challenges was to place the newspaper's assets in trust. This was achieved in 1936 to create distance between *The Guardian*'s financial viability and the volatility of the economic market. This move also linked the newspaper's financial expenditure to a set of foundational principles upheld by trustees, including: "honesty; cleanness (today interpreted as integrity); courage; fairness; and a sense of duty to the reader and the community" (The Guardian, 2015). This institutional innovation has become typical over *The Guardian*'s history with the newspaper focusing on breaking high profile, public-interest stories, adopting

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<sup>37</sup> The Manchester Guardian was established following the notorious Peterloo Massacre (1819) in which armed soldiers were used to disperse a peaceful demonstration calling for parliamentary reform, held at St Peter's Field, Manchester. The soldiers charged the crowd and 11 people were killed. The name 'Peterloo' derives from the name of the location and the Battle of Waterloo, which has taken place in the recent Napoleonic Wars (Vallance, 2013).

innovative marketing techniques and developing new products, such as live-blogs and real-time web chats for readers (*ibid.*). Viewed in this historical and organisational context, it is possible to understand how the Edward Snowden leaks form part of an established institutional legacy at *The Guardian* in which the blending of public interest reporting with securing commercial viability is a dominant and enduring theme.

In addition to understanding *The Guardian*'s historical position in the current case study, it is also important to consider the challenging market context in which *The Guardian* (and other institutional news organisations) finds itself. Anderson *et al* provide a guiding narrative of this "institutional decline and collapse, [...] rebirth, and [...] institutional adaptation." (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012 45). This typology enables an understanding of the institutional pressures and motivations that arguably influence the editorial and commercial decisions informing *The Guardian*'s news-making practices and thus provides an important context for the underlying organisational power dynamics from which the Snowden Files stories emerged.

Underpinning journalism's institutional decline over the past decade has been the internet's disruption of complacent commercial models and sclerotic organisational structures (Benkler, 2011a). As Lewis notes:

for much of the twentieth century, both the business model and the professional routines of journalism in developed nations were highly stable and successful enterprises because they took advantage of scarcity, exclusivity, and control. In the local information market, news media dominated the means of media production, access to expert source material, and distribution to wide audiences – which translated to tremendous [economic and political] capital (Lewis, 2012: 838)

The rise of digitally networked individuals with low-cost and relatively easy access to media production and distribution technologies (Benkler, 2006), however, rapidly created "decentralised information production" and "new opportunities for [media] models based on neither markets nor the state for financing" (Benkler, 2011a: 49). The net result for professional journalism was hyper-competition among media institutions, "fragmentation of the audience and polarisation of viewpoints" and a rapidly imploding business model (*ibid.* note 294).

The commercial impact of such changes is made visible in the decline in offline

audiences. In the UK, circulation of national newspapers fell on average 8 per cent year-on-year between 2009 and 2015 (Sutcliffe, 2015a); European newspaper circulation fell 21 per cent while US news circulation fell nine per cent between 2010 and 2014 (Sutcliffe, 2015b). Similarly, viewing time among UK television audiences fell 15 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (Ofcom, 2015) while US television audiences fell seven per cent over the same period (Statista, 2016).

These declines are coupled with a broadly comparable collapse in advertising revenues. Print advertising revenues in the United State collapsed by more than 50 per cent between 2007 and 2013 and UK print advertising revenues fell 43 per cent over the same period (Enders, Watkins, & McCabe, 2015). Conversely, online audiences and advertising revenues have shown a marked increase within the same timeframe. UK online news sites have averaged 18 per cent year-on-year growth (Ponsford, 2016) with US online news sites averaging nine per cent year-on-year growth (Statista, 2015). Similarly, US digital advertising spend rose by 58 per cent between 2011 and 2014 (PewResearchCenter, 2014a) while UK digital advertising spend continued growing to represent more than 50 per cent of all newsbrand advertising (Glennie, 2015; Sweney, 2015).

It should be noted, however, that despite rises in digital advertising spend the additional revenue appears to not be sufficient to cover overall losses (Edmonds, Guskin, Mitchell, & Jurkowitz, 2013). Compounding this reality are two recent trends further undermining advertising revenue: firstly, dominant digital corporations that increasingly intermediate digital content are encroaching on traditional media publishers' revenues. Facebook and Google, for example, are expected to "take half of the total UK digital display advertising market" (Sweney, 2015).

Secondly, the rapid growth in adoption of ad-blocking software among online audiences is having a significant and detrimental effect on the future viability of digital advertising (Sweney, 2016). Beyond the bottom-line, the news industry has undergone a series of symbolic crises: the size of US newsrooms' workforces has fallen by a third between 2003 and 2013 (PewResearchCenter, 2014b) and even the UK's *Guardian* newspaper faced significant job losses despite strong performance of its online advertising (Alpert, 2016; Spence, 2016).

Such challenges to the media's economic and symbolic power have exposed the negative impact digital disruption is having on journalism's civic and social power. Scholars argue the increased competition between traditional news producers and

internet-enabled start-ups, bloggers and networked communities is catalysing the transition from a once dominant ‘Trustee Model’ of media where journalists “decide what news citizens should know to act as informed participants in democracy” (Paulussen, Heinonen, Domingo, & Quandt, 2007: 134) to a ‘Market Model’ where “[c]onsumer demand is the ultimate arbiter of the news product.” (Schudson, 1998: 135). Boczkowski’s (2010) and Boczkowski and de Santos’ (2007) multi-disciplinary study of contemporary news work in North and South America reinforces this notion by detailing the increased intensification of monitoring and imitation of content among competing news outlets resulting in a high level of homogenisation in the stories produced.

Similarly, other scholars argue that the majority of online media content being produced for increasingly fragmented audiences is more aligned with lifestyle or entertainment values rather than a Habermasian civic ideal (Curran & Witschge, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010: 112-125; Sparks, 2001). Structurally this “compression of the ‘news cycle’” (Newman, 2009 2) combined with newsrooms’ reduced capacities for quality news reporting (Currah, 2009; Davies, 2009) further limits the available range of sources for journalists and consequently the range of content for audiences (Phillips, 2010; Redden & Witschge, 2010). Thus, critics argue, despite the apparent “communicative abundance” (Karppinen, 2009) of the digitally networked media environment the range of output is arguably narrower and more homogenous than at any previous time.

The proliferation of information produced in digital networks also presents operational challenges for contemporary journalists with implications for journalists’ professional identity as well as concepts of media power and gate-keeping theory in particular. As digital information reorients itself away from earlier narrative forms and towards the distinctly digitised forms of the database and “information flows”, (Manovich, 1999, 2012) source materials can be best understood as entering news gathering and production processes as "unstructured data, coming in fragments of raw, unprocessed journalism from both professionals and the public" requiring journalistic practice to shift towards “a more iterative and collaborative approach in reporting and verifying the news” (Hermida, 2012: 665). This necessary collaboration arguably diminishes the journalist’s role as powerful arbiter of news values and thus undermines their professional identity as trustees of democracy (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

The notion of journalists acting as powerful gate-keepers, for example, is revised by

Bruns (Bruns, 2003, 2005) as “gatewatching”. Gatewatching, Bruns argues, relegates the journalist’s once powerful role to one of merely facilitating a flow of networked information from a range of formal and informal; verified and unverifiable sources. Delli Carpini and Williams (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2004), meanwhile, go beyond a reconceptualisation of the gatewatching’s “facilitative” journalism by asserting that such processes not only diminish the civic and democratic potential of news but risk generating the potential for “the capture of the political agenda by arguably unrepresentative interests.” (*ibid.*: 1225). Such capturing of the media agenda by digitally empowered citizens is made possible through the agenda-setting potential of blogs (Meraz, 2007, 2009) which, Meraz argues, are “redistributing power between traditional media and citizen media” (Meraz, 2009: 701). Similarly, such use of social media also provides the ability for citizens to frame and counter-frame stories (Cooper, 2010; Davis, 2009; Farrell & Drezner, 2008) thus creating alternative discourses and challenging the authority of traditional media and individual journalists.

The potentially disempowering nature of collaborative news can be further extended to audiences where, despite the increased opportunities in online media for user participation and democratic deliberation in news-making, evidence suggests that such collaborative processes are created primarily as commercial strategies designed to engage readers and ensure customer loyalty (Vujnovic *et al.*, 2010: 291-294). Terranova (2004: 73) argues that this form of “free labour” operates as “communicative capitalism” (Dean, 2010) which not only risks undermining journalism’s professional status in an attempt to expropriate economic value in a difficult commercial environment but generates “a sense of participation - a sense of engagement, democratic activity and contribution - without real democratic action” (Vujnovic *et al.*, 2010: 295).

The increasing integration of technology into journalistic practice creates a number of further challenges to normative democratic models of news due to the role played by technological affordances in shaping news production. This “computational” model of journalism (Anderson, 2012) reveals how the potential for pluralistic and deliberative news enhanced by digitally networked citizens is failing to be realised through new technologies which are instead employed to deliver more accurate content based on current – and even predicted - consumer demands (Anderson, 2012) and known as the ‘algorithmic audience’ (Roth, 2009). Similarly, the potential affordances of online linking – designed to enhance the diversity of source material

and content for readers - is similarly undermined through commercial strategies that reduce the presence of external links in an attempt to maximise audience value by preventing the exploration of alternative, potentially competitive, content (Anderson, 2011). Technology's role seen in such light arguably doesn't just reduce the civic potential of news, but entirely defers journalistic agency to unseen non-human computational forms that are largely unaccountable in the news-making processes.

The growth of technology in the news-making process, however, also offers the potential for journalism's rejuvenation in the face of media's earlier corporate "exclusivity and control" (Lewis, 2012: 838). This rebirth is apparent in a number of areas, countering the pessimistic claims of critical scholars. Early in the evolution of digital technology a wave of media scholars and practitioners identified the potential for technology to fundamentally transform institutionalised journalism - both breaking media's corporate domination and reinvigorating the ideological potential of the profession.

Rosen (2006), for instance, discusses a technologically equipped citizenry – "The People Formerly Known as the Audience" - that is beginning to challenge the hitherto commoditised notions of audiences as passive "eyeballs" to sell to advertisers. This "former audience" is empowered to actively create and shape the news agenda, in turn leading Bowman and Willis (2003) and Gillmor (2006) to articulate the notion of an emerging 'citizen media'. These citizen journalists, they assert, strengthen journalism's democratic function by reinvigorating its power as a civic watchdog previously undermined by commercial imperatives (Curran, 2002).

As the complexities of digitally mediated news-gathering and reporting became better understood, terms such as "citizen journalists" - which perpetuated a distinct and largely misplaced professional/amateur divide – evolved to recognise a more fluid "networked journalism" (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Jarvis, 2006a). The notion of networked journalism crucially addresses the role the public plays both in publishing their own stories and in contributing "additional layer[s] of information and comment" (Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2012: 18) as well as "corrections, questions, facts, and perspective" (Jarvis, 2006) to mainstream news stories.

Such positive opportunities for the role technology can play in strengthening journalism's democratic power is identified by Newman *et al.* (2012) who propose that a 'Fifth Estate', comprised of informal, technologically empowered media actors, operates symbiotically with the traditional Fourth Estate in producing

contemporary news. These informal and formal media actors revive journalism's democratic role by providing traditional media with "a level of independence from control" combined with a strong adherence to the normative online values of transparency and openness (Newman et al., 2012: 15-16).

Feeding this narrative, Beckett (2008) argues that networked journalism's symbiotic operation is "transforming the power relationship between the media and the public" (*ibid.*: 43) by enhancing journalism's oldest virtues, including providing marginalised groups with a voice and listening and responding to public needs and concerns and, as a result, helping increase the diversity and depth of news reporting. Benkler (2006) situates such normative ideals within the historical context of the Habermasian public sphere by proposing the existence of a new networked public sphere that "enables many more individuals to communicate their observations and their viewpoints to many others, and to do so in a way that cannot be controlled by media owners and is not as easily corruptible by money as were the mass media" (Benkler, 2006: 32).

The strengthening of journalism's new digital norms arguably produces beneficial changes in the day-to-day practice and processes of journalism. For instance, Lewis (2012) suggests that the values inherent in informal, networked communities, including:

iteration, tinkering, transparency, and participation, each embedded in the open-source ethic, can be brought into the newsroom [...] as a structural retooling of news technologies and user interfaces. (Lewis, 2012: 638)

Such transformations can be found in the analysis of a range of phenomena prevalent in networked media environments that are increasingly becoming standard practices in news production.

For example, Newman et al (2012) recount how the adoption of "live-blogs" - defined as "live conversation[s] around a big story incorporating breaking news and verified facts with eyewitness material and audience opinion from social media channels" (*ibid.*: 14) – by institutional media demonstrates how journalists are adapting to the compressed news-cycle and diverse, often unverified, content produced by informal media actors. By refocusing their efforts on "being the best at verifying and curating" (Newman, 2009: 2) information, rather than searching out and breaking exclusive stories, media can effectively compete with the dynamics of



networked news to ensure “their agendas and discussions continue to shape conversations around major news stories” (Newman, 2011: 6).

As journalists participate in these new, networked spaces they begin to establish identities for themselves as “network nodes” (*ibid.*) helping them establish influence within digital networks and consequently building their own audience communities. This enables networked journalists to quickly and easily identify breaking stories, distribute news content, source public feedback and achieve a heightened trust among audiences who value the human interaction available with once elite and inaccessible media actors (Newman, 2011: 48).

The technological affordances of “computational journalism” (Anderson, 2012) also presents practical value to contemporary newsrooms where the rise of “programmer-journalists” (Lewis, 2012: 614) have helped develop technological tools that enable newsrooms to rapidly analyse the vast, yet potentially story rich, volumes of publicly available data to break exclusive stories or identify hitherto unknown aspects of existing ones. Cohen (2011) and Schudson (2010) assert that such developments possess the potential to reinvigorate journalism’s civic role in the contemporary technologically-driven news environment. Indeed, both of these trends are evidenced in *The Guardian*’s strategic adoption of digital news-making in the Snowden Files case.

Finally – and perhaps most significantly for the #AskSnowden case study - while strengthening journalism’s democratic values, political power and professional integrity is important, it can be argued that without a stable and solid commercial foundation the future of public interest journalism is largely unsustainable. Newman *et al.* (2012) and Newman (2009) offer empirical evidence indicating that the increased level of networking among media organisations and journalists, such as that outlined above, is helping to improve content exposure and grow audiences, and thus increase revenues.

Some news organisations, including *The Guardian*, have experimented with the use of new technologies to bolster business models, for example, using socially networked journalists and readers to distribute and share news stories (Dutton & Blank, 2011; Newman *et al.*, 2012: 6); targeting growing international news audiences as a result of the internet’s global reach (Newman, 2011 6) and a focus on the recruitment and use of digital marketing specialists (Newman, 2011: 11; Owens, 2012).

Perhaps the most significant story in the transformation of the media industry is the way in which established news institutions are adapting to the new technology empowered environment. Anderson *et al.* (2012) assert that researchers “need to ask how traditional news organisations are reshaping their processes to adapt to a changing information environment”, understand how “news institutions try to routinise disruption with as little change to their work processes and ideological self-image as possible” and ultimately account for how “new institutions become old and stable and how old institutions become new and flexible” (Anderson *et al.*, 2012: 47-48).

*The Guardian* newspaper is one high-profile example of a legacy institution learning from the dynamic, distributed, open and flexible ethos of the networked media ecosystem and applying such knowledge to its news-making operations. This approach is arguably part of *The Guardian*’s dedicated and strategic attempt to reconfigure itself as a “digital first” media institution (The Guardian, 2011) that undertakes “mutual journalism” (Greenslade, 2011) with the paper’s journalists and audience working together to co-create its output. These changes are visible in the organisation’s use of live-blogging to curate and aggregate breaking news stories (Wells, 2011), actively involving audiences in shaping the newspaper’s editorial agenda (Roberts, English, & Finch, 2011), hosting open Q&As with key journalists and key figures within news stories (The Guardian, 2013) and encouraging journalists to participate with audiences and sources continuously via social media to “weave content into the fabric of the web” (Wing, 2010).

These emergent news-making practices are important to the development of this chapter’s analysis as while on the one hand they point to *The Guardian*’s innovative adaption and attempted renewal in the networked media environment, while at the same time they can be seen as vital to the organisation’s economic viability. Unlike other corporate news institutions placing content behind subscription-only paywalls, *The Guardian* has openly committed to ensuring its news reporting remains free and open (Ponsford & Turvill, 2015; Turvill, 2014; Viner, 2013). Such a development is closely related to the organisational evolution of *The Guardian* throughout its history, as discussed earlier.

As such, it is imperative to *The Guardian*’s commercial viability that it seeks to innovate and align its news-making and publishing strategy with that of the networked media environment. However, this also presents a tension that while seeking to replicate the practices of free and open of information production typified

by the networked environment (Benkler, 2006: 2-7), it has also to balance these non-market motivations with a fundamental need to earn revenue through such networked practices in order to remain economically viable.

This tension is at the heart of *The Guardian*'s institutional renewal. For instance, has the newspaper's digital-first "practice and philosophy" (The Guardian, 2011) approach to contemporary news-making helped it integrate and collaborate with the new network-powered citizen media? Or has it enabled the legacy news institution to leverage its traditional position as a corporate news outlet to develop and exert a revitalised elite media power under the ideological guise of networked or mutualised journalism (Charlie Beckett & Robin Mansell, 2008; Greenslade, 2011; Jarvis, 2006b).

### **#AskSnowden?: 'News values' versus 'network values'**

Chadwick and Collister (2014) have identified a number of ways in which *The Guardian* demonstrated "mastery over the networked affordances of social media" (Chadwick & Collister, 2014: 2432). These include: encouraging its journalists writing Snowden Files stories to interact with online networks, distribute content, enrol a plurality of formal and informal actors in the shaping of the story and extensive use of 'live-blogging'.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach arguably helped *The Guardian* operate according to the logic of digitally-networked media by adopting media production practices premised on linking to and embedding third-party materials - practices primarily derived from the normative behaviour of bloggers and online communities.

The most significant development in *The Guardian*'s use of technology to report the Snowden story is the way in which it used its own website to host an exclusive live web chat with Snowden. This web chat, known by the explicitly Twitter-friendly title #AskSnowden, was significant for two reasons. Firstly, the web chat itself was a novel and cleverly planned news-making format designed to overtly enable *The Guardian* to engage online networks that existed around the Snowden revelations. In fact, the newspaper itself trails the web chat as "the interview the world's media organisations have been chasing for more than a week, but instead Edward Snowden

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<sup>38</sup> First developed in sports reporting, the live blogging of political news first emerged during the late 2000s and has quickly become the most important genre for breaking news online (Thurman & Walters, 2013). It is typified as a hybrid newsgathering and publishing format that integrates formal news reporting from formal sources with the curation and presentation of user-generated information from informal sources.

is giving *Guardian* readers the exclusive” (Greenwald, 2013) [emphasis in original]. To reinforce just how exclusive the opportunity is, Glenn Greenwald, *The Guardian*’s lead journalist responsible for breaking the Snowden story, urges its readers: “Ask him anything” (*ibid.*).

Secondly, *The Guardian*’s exclusive web chat was coordinated and managed through a specially created live-blog webpage on *The Guardian*’s website. This live-blog displayed a number of innovative features already discussed as indicative of institutional media’s adaption to and renewal in the digitally networked communication environment typified. Specifically, these features included a live-blog of the #AskSnowden chat which according to Thurman and Walters is the most important genre for breaking news online (Thurman & Walters, 2013) in that it functions as a hybrid newsgathering and publishing format integrating news reporting from formal sources with the curation and presentation of user-generated information from informal sources.

In addition, the #AskSnowden live-blog incorporates commenting which allows readers to post questions direct to the live-blog and interact with other members of the live-blog community. The development of *The Guardian*’s own digital platform is a significant development here in that the media institution sees it as a beneficial step to develop its own media platform for the web chat. Rather than relying on the functionality of the platform being designed by another technology company and having its web chat content being generated and owned by a potential competitor, *The Guardian* used its own institutional and commercially-powerful position to develop its own platform. As a result, *The Guardian* had full control of the emerging #AskSnowden story and was able it to choreograph and territorialise the media assemblage more effectively.

Finally, the use of the #AskSnowden hashtag in the title of the web chat suggests an explicitly Twitter-friendly approach to news-gathering and production. This is designed to enable networked actors to engage with *The Guardian*’s initiative as well as making it easier for the live-blog coordinators to find relevant Snowden-related questions being asked via Twitter’s dispersed networks of users and to integrate them into the web chat.

The specifics of Twitter as a platform also need to be taken into account when contextualising *The Guardian*'s role in choreographing the #AskSnowden media assemblage. For example, Lapowsky (2013) has noted that one of Twitter's limitations as a media platform is that its founders had found difficulty in defining its purpose and, therefore, its specific functionality. As a result, Twitter's design and evolution was largely driven by its users focusing the platform on the production and sharing of multi-media, short-form messages with a highly inter-personal nature (MacArthur, 2018). This development potentially suits the purposes of *The Guardian*'s own online, networked #AskSnowden question and answer session. Firstly, Twitter offers the media publisher both an established forum for informal networked actors to interact with one another and discuss topical issues. Secondly, it is a largely community-led platform, with minimal oversight by the platform owners making providing *The Guardian* with a strong potential to co-opt and make use of Twitter content for its own purposes (Thompson, 2017).

Despite this self-conscious approach to using social media and other forms of online engagement in its news-gathering and production, the question remains whether this was really an attempt to adapt to the networked norms of the contemporary digital media environment or whether this was a merely a "shrewd and strategic approach" (Chadwick and Collister, 2014: 2432) that gave a semblance of collaboration with online networked actors as part of a commercial plan. If the latter, it would mean that *The Guardian* was able to continue "controlling their source and their scoop" to maximise its economic position in the hyper-competitive news industry (Benkler, 2011b: 49) in order to exert a contemporary media power. These questions are answered through empirical analysis of media content data generated by the #AskSnowden web chat – both on Twitter and *The Guardian*'s live-blog platform.

This content was analysed and codified into themes to explore how the choreography and territorialisation of the media assemblage converged or diverged between the different formal and informal media actors operating in the case study. From the analysis four main themes were identified as dominant concerns within the #AskSnowden live-blog community (see *Table 1*).

**Table 1 – Dominant themes of questions asked by #AskSnowden live-blog participants as a percentage of the overall community**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>As a % of the community</b>
Democratic implications of Snowden’s leaks	23%
Personal privacy concerns	26%
Operational questions about NSA systems and software functioned	20%
Personal questions directed to Snowden on a range of topics	18%

The first dominant theme to emerge from the reader community questions pertains to democracy and the democratic implications of Snowden’s actions. Within this group a number of sub-themes can be further identified according to whether the community member displayed a bias towards or against Edward Snowden.<sup>39</sup> For instance, a small number (12 per cent) of democracy-oriented questions were made by community members with an anti-Snowden bias. These questioned Snowden’s decision to by-pass democratic processes and take individual responsibility to publicly reveal the NSA’s alleged abuses of domestic (and international) legislation.

One community member, PizzaioloMike, asks:

The NSA was and is, operating under the laws of the United States, as passed by Congress. FISA Court is in the loop and in concurrence. To me, this seems legal.; You signed a legally binding oath and non-disclosure agreement. You broke that oath and non-disclosure agreement.; So, which of the two are law-breakers, and which should be prosecuted? (PizzaioloMike, 2013)

Similarly, Reality\_701 asks:

How do you justify revealing operations that are not a violation of American law? American laws do not prohibit intelligence agencies from breaking laws against trespassing and computer intrusion in foreign countries for a good reason. You decided, on your own, that intelligence agencies should obey the

<sup>39</sup> Questions were coded for bias according to whether they were evidently supportive or oppositional to Snowden’s actions. For example, questions including praise or thanks were coded ‘Pro-Snowden’ whereas questions referring to Snowden as a traitor or criticizing Snowden for acting outside of the law were coded as ‘Anti-Snowden’. Questions without evidence of judgement or opinion were coded ‘Neutral’.

"law as it should be according to Edward Snowden." We did not elect you. If you want to change the law, run for office (Reality\_701, 2013)

Another smaller group of questions (seven per cent) fall into a neutral category which consists of users requesting confirmation on previous statements made by Snowden. These include whether he believes members of congress to be betraying democracy and US citizens by being complicit in lies made to Congress by representatives of the NSA (JoshC2013, 2013) or whether Congress had lied to the US public about the 9/11 attacks (Taylor\_Hatfield, 2013).

The majority of questions (76 per cent), however, emerge from the Pro-Snowden contingent within the web chat community. Although the specifics of each question differ slightly, all comments made by Pro-Snowden members seek to understand whether Snowden believes that the NSA acted undemocratically and as a result has eroded civil liberties for US (and at times, global) citizens. One particular sub-theme emerges from community members who are concerned by the fact that the NSA and US government could deploy its powers of surveillance to prevent democratic representation and accountability being achieved. HenriBetancourt asks whether the NSA's "mass surveillance is [used] to predict patterns of domestic political organisation beyond the Democrat/Republican scheme? [And] to get a handle on tendencies and certain individuals before organised movements begin to challenge the system?" (HenriBetancourt, 2013). Another user, daking1, asks whether the NSA's mass surveillance machine could be turned on the Tea Party or Occupy movement to prevent political change (Daking1, 2013).

The second significant theme emerging from the web chat community is the issue of privacy. Breaking out 'question' themes by Snowden-bias again reveals sub-thematic differences: Anti-Snowden community members (7 per cent) all question whether Snowden was naïve enough to believe that the NSA and US government wasn't engaged in routine, mass surveillance and query his ultimate motives in leaking the information he has (Cram, 2013). Conversely, the neutral questions arising (15 per cent) all cover broader privacy concerns, such as whether citizens not suspected of crimes are being monitored (Rdbrewer, 2013), whether the NSA monitored delegates at the 2010 G20 summit (SECRETOFKOREA, 2013) and whether Snowden has evidence of eavesdropping on politicians or other whistleblowers' phone calls (Rlewebecky, 2013).

Again, questions arising from supporters of Snowden's actions make up the majority of the comments, with community members querying Snowden on a range of privacy related topics, including how – and whether – the US government can adequately resolve the perceived loss of privacy by US citizens. Community member Valerie Tongue asks if it is possible “for people to have a reasonable sense of security about their privacy again merely by introducing new regulation and oversight, or would any such effort be insufficient?” (JulienOffray, 2013) while TheSeanW asks whether US society can “put a premium on privacy, or has it been lost forever in the name of "fighting terrorism and keeping people safe"? (TheSeanW, 2013). Similarly, others query whether the government will seek to use Snowden's revelations as the “perfect opportunity to legalise such monitoring” rather than securing the public privacy (ValerieTongue, 2013).

If the first two dominant themes reflect the understandable public concerns of what Snowden's revelations means for either individual privacy at the micro-level and democratic institutions at the macro-level, the third theme identified arguably represents an interesting development in terms of seeking out granular detail from Snowden as to the operation of NSA systems. This theme can be termed ‘operational questions’ and presents little variance in terms of content biased towards or against Snowden. Rather than expressing support or hostility for Snowden and his actions, these community members are more interested in gaining insights into how they can adapt their personal web behaviour and software choices to be effective against the NSA.

Specific queries are highly technical and include whether the NSA can access Tor networks<sup>40</sup> (Greenberg, 2013) or VPNs<sup>41</sup> (Aileronica, 2013) or whether Linux is a more secure operating system than Windows (Moulder, 2013). A greater number of questions on this theme, however, are designed to uncover how the NSA's systems operate. These cover topics such as what methods are used within the PRISM programme to trigger target surveillance, e.g. key words or behavioural patterns (IntegrityAboveAll, 2013; RobertClark, 2013). Also, whether NSA datasets are encrypted when being transferred between analysts/partner agencies (dpiUSA, 2013)

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<sup>40</sup> Tor is free, publicly-available software designed to enable anonymous communication.

<sup>41</sup> VPNs are virtual private networks that offer users that have access secure and ‘private’ communications across a public network.



and to what extent the NSA are running backdoor surveillance exploits<sup>42</sup> in the Linux/Unix software families (DroneTarget, 2013). Such specific and highly technically questions reveal a particular interest from members of the public in terms of how the NSA operates and, equally, suggests a that a not insignificant proportion of the #AskSnowden network are potentially technically-minded or software developers.

Finally, the most prevalent theme of questions (30 per cent) from *The Guardian's* web chat community can be those termed 'personal'; that is questions directed at Snowden which are primarily intended to learn what opinions, feelings or preferences he holds on a range of issues. As with the operational questions, the nature of these questions does not seem to reflect any particular bias towards Snowden. Rather they seem primarily concerned with the ways in which the unfolding events surrounding Snowden and his flight from US law enforcement leaks have affected him, and his family, *personally*.

The questions asked of Snowden range from trying to discover whether he is "afraid what might happen next?" (Vickifm, 2013) and, more broadly, if he has fears for the safety of his friends and family remaining in the US (MacGruber, 2013). Derhund1 asks what languages he speaks and what his favourite computer game is (Derhund1, 2013). Other questions within this theme focus more on Snowden's motivations to leak the information, such as whether he went to "work with the CIA with the intentions of uncovering a government scandal to try to help the American people (JazzyJay16, 2013); why he waited until after the 2012 election before revealing the material (rk13dkl, 2013) and what advice would he give to others in a similar position considering leaking information (jessicatesta, 2013).

A smaller number of community members express an interest in how the leaks have impacted on his relationship with his girlfriend (Leolll, 2013; livisan, 2013) - with one concerned community members even asking: "Do you have a message for your girlfriend?" (FayeKane, 2013). Given the arguably serious or weighty topics emerging in previous questions' themes, it might seem out of place for the most prolific question theme to be one focused on more 'soft news' angles. Such a reality, however, could be indicative of the broader trend in news-making to reflect a 'human

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<sup>42</sup> A backdoor exploit refers to the process of obtaining unauthorized access to computer software or hardware.

interest' angle or more entertainment-focused agenda when reporting 'hard news' (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011). Such a development has been identified by some scholars within digitally-networked media, despite the popular, idealised notion of the networked public sphere being discussed in relation to political and policy debate in a digital environment content (Curran and Witschge, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010).

From content analysis of the tweets featuring the hashtag #AskSnowden it becomes immediately clear that they are predominantly not used to take part in *The Guardian's* web chat with Edward Snowden. From the sample of 500 tweets gathered for analysis, 60 per cent (n=298) do not pose a question. Of the 202 tweets asking questions for inclusion in *The Guardian's* web chat, the two dominant themes featured were 'operational questions' (15 per cent of tweets) and 'personal questions' (33 per cent). Other themes, such as concerns over democratic implications, personal privacy, national security and Snowden's location represent only between four to eight per cent of the dataset.

This suggests a thematic overlap with the live-blog community's interest in Snowden's personal attributes and granular detail as to NSA operations. This could suggest that the primary role of the Twitter chat appears to contradict the notion, suggested by previous analyses of the #AskSnowden web chat, that Twitter would prove an effective way for *The Guardian* to "sourc[e] questions to put to Snowden" from the "real-time conversations emerging on Twitter around the #AskSnowden hashtag" (Chadwick & Collister, 2014, 2433). Rather, analysis of the 60 per cent of tweets not posing questions to Snowden suggests that these primarily operate as helping *The Guardian* achieve a range of promotional outcomes.

For example, a meta-analysis of the tweets not posing questions, indicates that in terms of content, 63 per cent (n=187) of tweets were directly promotional. That is, they explicitly made other networked actors aware of *The Guardian* live web chat with Edward Snowden and, significantly, helped drive website traffic to *The Guardian's* live-blog platform by posting a web link to the Q&A. Additionally, a large proportion of these tweets (24 per cent; n=71) feature soundbite-esque quotations from *The Guardian's* own coverage itself. The implications of this mean that even if Twitter users don't click through to the web chat itself, they have at least been exposed to the content that reinforces *The Guardian* as provider of exclusive

and ground-breaking journalism. In turn, this supports exposure to *The Guardian's* brand – itself creating powerful commercial opportunities (Aaker, 2009; Bick, 2009).

Looking at the functionality of these promotional tweets, 79 per cent (n=235) are 'retweets'<sup>43</sup> (RTs) of other actors' original tweets. This is further significant as it demonstrates that a majority of the promotional Twitter content didn't contain original material – rather it acted as a promoter network raising awareness of *The Guardian's* initiative. Again, original content here is dominated by *The Guardian*. Within these promotional retweets, 37 per cent are of *The Guardian's* own tweets that were originally posted to raise awareness of the #AskSnowden web chat. Other notable promoters of *The Guardian's* tweets include left-wing organisations, particularly those affiliated (or claiming affiliation) to the online hacker network, *Anonymous*, (Thought-Criminal, 2013), and the digitally-driven protest movement, OccupyWallStreet (OccupyWallStreet, 2013).

Perhaps most interestingly, almost one in ten (nine per cent; n=17) of promotional retweets are made up of competing media organisations, ranging from contemporary, 'digital native' news outlets, such as the *Huffington Post* and *Vice*, through to more traditional news organisations, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* (USAToday, 2013; WallStreetJournal, 2013). This reveals that *The Guardian's* presumed strategy for enrolling informal grassroots and citizen media actors into news-making network to enable it to spread its content also works, albeit perhaps inadvertently, in enrolling more established competitive media actors to help promote *The Guardian's* content.

These findings from the close reading are further substantiated by an analysis of the top 100 retweeted content drawn from the complete Twitter dataset (see *Table 2* and *Table 3*). These reveal that the second most retweeted actor was *The Guardian* newspaper itself; while the most common feature of the top 100 #AskSnowden retweets was a link to *The Guardian's* web chat, representing more than half of the 100 tweets. Similarly, the second and third most prevalent features were pithy, tweetable, soundbite-esque quotes from Edward Snowden himself or general promotional copy, such as "HAPPENING NOW: Edward Snowden is answering your questions [http://t.co /UzrQRXst54](http://t.co/UzrQRXst54) #AskSnowden #NSAfiles" (GuardianUS, 2013) or "LIVE Q&A w/ Edward Snowden: NSA whistleblower answers your

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<sup>43</sup> A 'retweet' refers to a Twitter post that is reposted or forwarded to a user's own network of followers.

questions at 11am EST | 4pm BST <http://t.co/UzrQRXst54> #AskSnowden”  
(GuardianUS, 2013).

**Table 2 – Content attributes of the top 100 retweeted #AskSnowden tweets**

Attributes from Top 100 RTs	No. of tweets
Containing link to #AskSnowden web chat	56
Quote from #AskSnowden web chat	31
Promoting #AskSnowden web chat	27
Humorous question	20
Operational question	9
Personal question	5
National security question	2
Spam	2
Criticism of Guardian	1

As per the manual analysis, a significant volume of the most retweeted tweets came from other media outlets (n=14), including ‘hard news’ sources, such as *ABC News* and the *Wall Street Journal* as well as ‘soft news’ sources, such as *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Online activist groups were also prevalent in promoting *The Guardian*’s hashtag, with Anonymous and Occupy Wall Street both active in generating some of the most retweeted content (n=12) from the complete Twitter dataset.

**Table 3 – Most frequently retweeted actors from the Top 100 retweeted #AskSnowden tweets**

Top actors from Top 100 RTs	No. of times RT’d
Individual actors	33
Guardian	21
Anonymous actors	17
Other media	14
Online activists	12
Spoof accounts	3

However, despite distributing its promotional activity to other media networks and online activists, analysis of the top 10 individual most mentioned sources in the complete hashtag dataset reveals *The Guardian* and affiliated contributors are highly active across the hash-tagged conversations. For example, *Guardian* sources represent half of the top 10 most mentioned sources within the complete #AskSnowden dataset, while a further third of the top sources are affiliated with the online activist group, Anonymous thus supporting the above findings (see *Table 4*).

**Table 4 – Top 10 most mentioned sources from complete #AskSnowden hashtag dataset**

<b>Top 10 most mentioned sources</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
@GuardianUS	Guardian US	Official Twitter account of the Guardian’s US edition
@Guardian	Guardian	Official Twitter account of the Guardian’s UK edition
@attackerman	Spencer Ackerman	Personal twitter account of Guardian journalist and contributor to the #AskSnowden web chat
@YourAnonNews	Anonymous	Account representing hacktivist group, Anonymous
@Jamesrbuk	James Ball	Personal twitter account of Guardian journalist and contributor to the Edward Snowden reporting
@_cypherpunks_	Michael	Unknown individual. Free speech advocate.
@AnonGhostt	N/A	Unknown account. Appears to be affiliated with the Anonymous network.
@DellCam	Dell Cameron	Personal twitter account of Vice journalist. Free speech advocate.
@Asher_Wolf	Asher Wolf	Personal twitter account of journalist and campaigner against state surveillance. Guardian contributor.
@TheWallenWay	The Wallen Way	Personal Twitter account of writer. and life coach.

In fact, the promotional nature of the tweets dominating the #AskSnowden hashtag seems to have been so overwhelming that they generated a backlash from the left-wing UK politician, Tom Watson, who tweeted: “The @Guardian is now openly *selling a story* instead of *telling a story*. #AskSnowden was journalistic farce. (And I’m a big Guardian fan).” (TomWatson, 2013) [emphasis added]. Indeed, the fact that such a criticism of the hashtag discussion for being too promotional receives enough retweets to place it in the top 100 further reinforces this finding.

Before delving into the thematic findings from an analysis of the #AskSnowden web chat answers, it is worth highlighting the narrow range of sources represented in the Q&A. From the 20 questions selected by *The Guardian* journalists coordinating the web chat for Snowden to answer, two of these are drawn from the 17,176 tweets published with the #AskSnowden hashtag, 13 are drawn from 3,845 live-blog comments. More significantly, five of the final 20 questions selected come direct from *Guardian* journalists reporting on the Snowden leaks. This raises pertinent questions about the representation of networked actors participating in the web chat. Given the important role in choreographing the media assemblage and coding the media frame around the story played by the final web chat questions, further questions can be asked as to what methods were adopted by the journalists coordinating the web chat in order to source questions from the live-blog and Twitter hashtag communities. Such considerations are key to understanding the context and underlying dynamics that influenced the ways *The Guardian* choreographed the territorialised the #AskSnowden media assemblage in ways which largely preented its deterritorialisation by other (opposing) actors.

An important consideration to explore further is when selecting the final questions from its online communities and networks for Snowden to answer, did *The Guardian*'s journalists choose them according to market-based principles? Did they use their institutional power as a globally-recognised media organisation (one with a legacy of producing public-interest journalism) to choreograph a selection that appeared to encompass views from the "networked public sphere" (Benkler, 2006)? However, in reality *The Guardian* carefully choreographed the content selection to ensure a particular cohort of the Twitter network aligned with *The Guardian*'s editorial position and thus supportive of its commercial aims was chosen?

Conversely, did *The Guardian*'s journalists select user-generated web chat content through a non-market choreographic process? That is, did the web chat content chosen territorialise the media assemblage in favour of the majority interests of the networked community? It can be argued that ensuring such a public interest choreography would have been possible through the use of technological tools available to *The Guardian* journalists and community managers working the #AskSnowden web chat. For example, the live-blog comment section includes a standard feature in *The Guardian* allowing users to vote up or vote down specific questions. By seeking out questions with the most 'community approval' it would be

possible for journalists to identify the most popular questions among the live-blog community. Similarly, using digital media analytics software<sup>44</sup> *The Guardian* journalists could have identified questions popular within the #AskSnowden hashtag by filtering tweets according to the volume of retweets (the number of times each tweet has been forwarded by a particular user). Such a measure could be interpreted as endorsement by the community, and thus a question worthy of being included.

Analysis of the final 20 questions selected for answer by Snowden reveals that a quarter of them were asked by *Guardian* journalists. In total, three journalists from *The Guardian* put questions to Snowden (including Glenn Greenwald who moderated the web chat). This suggests an over-representation of *The Guardian*'s own staff in the web chat, especially given that in the sample of 380 questions by the community the majority 95% were asked by informal rather than professional media actors. Moreover, in the sample of questions posted to the web chat live-blog 3% (n=11) were asked by rival media outlets, including *Forbes*, *ABC News*, the *LA Times* and *Reuters*.

Thus, despite the #AskSnowden web chat being promoted by *The Guardian* as offering its readers an "exclusive" opportunity to ask "[t]he whistleblower behind the biggest intelligence leak in NSA history" anything (Greenwald, 2013) a quarter of the available questions were asked by its own reporters who had already spent months debriefing Snowden prior to breaking the 'The NSA Files' stories. This further supports the hypothesis that despite its appearance as carefully choreographed public interest journalism enrolling professional and amateur news-making networks, *The Guardian*'s #AskSnowden's web chat seemed to be designed to engage digital networks primarily to mobilise them in promoting *The Guardian*'s content, rather than enable them to play a serious and well-structured role in networked news-making.

Deeper analysis of the full set of questions selected by *The Guardian* for Snowden to answer reveals a significant skew (47 per cent; n=9) to questions that are in the 'personal' category, followed by 'operational' (21 per cent; n = 4) and then questions about Snowden's choice of country in which to seek asylum (16 per cent; n = 3).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Such as that used in the collection and analysis of empirical data in this chapter

<sup>45</sup> Although this latter category is broken out from the larger 'personal' questions category it can be argued that there is potential overlap between these two categories if the interest in Snowden's location is also read from a human-interest perspective representing a mystery 'where is he now?' or 'thrill of the chase' angle.

Interestingly, this latter category represents a new topic not identified as a dominant or popular topic for the web chat community and Twitter network.

However, its presence as a relevant theme in the final questions is due to the fact that the three questions constituting this category were asked by *The Guardian's* journalists. This can be interpreted as *The Guardian's* reporters trying to leverage their exclusive access to Snowden in order to gain an advantage over competing news organisations which were, at the time of the web chat, preoccupied with ascertaining Snowden's exact whereabouts. The operational questions broadly mirror the granular interest in NSA processes and protocols, such as defining how "direct access" operates (DeRosa, 2013), what processes were in place to allow wiretaps (MonaHol, 2013) and whether email encryption is effective against NSA surveillance, as expressed by *The Guardian's* community (Mathius1, 2013).

Focusing analytical attention on the 'personal' coded questions it is possible to see a distinct overlap between the most dominant theme of user queries both within the final #AskSnowden Q&A as well as the web chat community. As with the online community, these questions are primarily designed to gauge Snowden's opinions, feelings or motivations on a number of topics, but predominantly personal or family-related subjects. For example, AhBrightWings asks Snowden:

given the enormity of what you are facing now in terms of repercussions, can you describe the exact moment when you knew you absolutely were going to do this, no matter the fallout, and what it now feels like to be living in a post-revelation world? (AhBrightWings, 2013)

Adding to the line of questioning about Snowden's personal opinion, tikkamasala [sic] asks: "So far are things going the way you thought they would..." (tikkamasala, 2013) while D. Aram Mushegian II seeks clarity about Snowden's claims regarding his previous salary:

Did you lie about your salary? What is the issue there? Why did you tell Glenn Greenwald that your salary was \$200,000 a year, when it was only \$122,000 (according to the firm that fired you.) (D.AramMushegianII, 2013)



Moreover, where other questions arise that seek to address the more ‘hard news’ topics which were also dominant within the community’s questions, such as the democratic implications of Snowden’s revelations or concerns over personal privacy, it can be argued that these questions too incorporate a personal – or ‘human interest’ – dimension. The American journalist and hacker, Jacob Appelbaum<sup>46</sup>, seeks to ascertain whether Snowden believes in the ability of the democratic process to adequately deal with Snowden’s whistle-blowing activities.

He asks: “Do you believe that the treatment of Binney, Drake and others influenced your path? Do you feel the "system works" so to speak? #AskSnowden” (JacobAppelbaum, 2013). Rather than filtering his query through the efficacy of Congress, US legislation or the political process to adequately deal with Snowden’s actions, he cites other high-profile or ‘celebrity’ whistleblowers, William Binney and Thomas Drake, (O’Cleirigh, 2014; Welna, 2014) to understand Snowden’s personal motivations in leaking top secret material. User, ActivistGal, makes a similar comparison between Snowden and celebrity whistleblowers, Daniel Ellsberg and Chelsea [Bradley] Manning, (Ricks, 2013) in seeking to understand Snowden’s personal motivation:

You have said [...] that you admire both Ellsberg [sic] and Manning, but have argued that there is one important distinction between yourself and the army private... "I carefully evaluated every single document I disclosed to ensure that each was legitimately in the public interest," [...] Are you suggesting that Manning indiscriminately dumped secrets into the hands of Wikileaks and that he intended to harm people? (ActivistGal, 2013)

Taken together it is evident that in general terms the two dominant themes of questions that is, ‘personal’ and ‘operational’, selected by *The Guardian* for the #AskSnowden web chat broadly align with two of the four dominant themes identified in the web chat community and online networks. However, it is pertinent to note that the other two dominant themes to be found in the web chat community questions, i.e. the democratic implications of Snowden’s leaks and individuals’ concerns about personal privacy do not feature substantially in *The Guardian*’s final

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<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that this question, while relevant to the analysis, is posted by an independent journalist, hacker and digital privacy activist, Jacob Appelbaum, who has been previously involved with the Wikileaks website and digital privacy tool, Tor. In 2016 Appelbaum left Tor following accusations of sexual misconduct, although as of 2018 no charges have yet been brought (Farivar, 2016). While the question posted as part of the #AskSnowden web chat remains relevant, the context surrounding the user should be recognized.

Q&A. One interpretation of this finding is that such editorial priorities made by *The Guardian* fit the pattern of the rise in the ‘human interest’ or ‘celebrity politics’ angles for soft news stories (Cushion & Franklin, 2015 71).

Adopting the terminology put forward by this thesis’ theoretical approach to contemporary media power, it can be argued that *The Guardian* carefully territorialises the #AskSnowden media assemblage to meet its own formal, institutional aims, while producing the appearance of the assemblage’s territorialisation by the networks of informal media actors acting in the public interest. Further supporting this line of argument – and pointing to the ways in which *The Guardian* territorialised - and ultimately coded - the #AskSnowden media assemblage is the way it choreographs the selection of the media content produced during the web chat. As is shown in the empirical analysis above, the questions being asked in both the web chat and on Twitter, and those that *The Guardian* chose to put to Snowden show a strong divergence between topics. Those gaining prominence in the final media produced by *The Guardian* is ultimately useful to its commercial aims, rather than those topics pertinent to the online community.

### **Celebrity whistle-blowing and soft news: economic influences in the #AskSnowden media assemblage**

In recent decades media scholars have demonstrated how news reporting in the West has shifted in theme and tone from “hard news” to “soft news” (Barnett, Gaber, & Ramsay, 2012; Cushion & Franklin, 2015). Such a shift is characterised by a displacement of stories about “major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life” with news focusing on “celebrities, human interest [...] and other entertainment-centred stories” (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011: 224).

Furthermore, coverage of political and international affairs stories has not escaped this trend, in turn giving rise to a “celebrity politics” (Marsh, Hart, & Tindall, 2010; West & Orman, 2002). This can be understood as an increasing “tabloidisation” of news coverage with the lines between news, information and entertainment becoming blurred, causing politics to become a form of “entertainment and spectacle” where political figures “become celebrities and [...] are packaged and sold like the products of the culture industry” (Kellner, 2015 114). Moreover, such

figures are “increasingly covered in the same way as celebrities, with tabloidised news media [...] obsessing about their private lives” (*ibid.*).

While it may not be entirely fair to argue that *The Guardian*'s coverage of the Snowden materials was tabloid-esque given the wide-ranging and substantial impacts the news outlet's reporting had on legal, political, policy and intelligence spheres on a global scale (Chadwick & Collister, 2014: 2422), it is certainly possible to observe that even such major reporting has been influenced by the softening effects of the commercially-driven forces of contemporary news-making.

*The Guardian*'s selection of 'personal' questions for the final #AskSnowden web chat designed to ascertain Snowden's personal feelings about whether he felt his whistleblowing was “going the way [he] thought they would” (tikamasala, 2013); what advice he might have for other “wannabe” whistleblowers (Latvaitis, 2013); the comparisons with other 'celebrity' whistleblowers such as Binney, Drake, Elsburg and Manning, all seem to suggest a territorialisation of the #AskSnowden media assemblage and, ultimately, coding of the media frame around the story and its main protagonist through a celebrity politics lens.

This argument is further evidenced by the way *The Guardian* intentionally developed a sense of entertainment around its coverage of Snowden's leaked materials by 'packaging' the stories on dedicated parts of *The Guardian*'s website, rather than just within the news section. Moreover, each packaged section of the story was given what Chadwick and Collister term “the filmic banners *The NSA Files* and *The Snowden Files*” suggesting that even such events of global significance can be “packaged and sold” as part of an entertainment-driven media industry (Kellner, 2015: 114).

This is significant as it means that the territorialisation and coding of the #AskSnowden assemblage by *The Guardian*'s choreography around the leaked Snowden materials differs substantially from that being choreographed by the networked web chat and Twitter communities. While the prevalence of 'personal' questions asked by the web chat community can't be overlooked, it must be noted that this category of questions is one of four dominant themes each representing a broadly comparative volume of questions.

While a section of the online community *was interested* in the human-interest dimensions behind Snowden's actions, overall the community was more concerned with finding out what implications the NSA's activities had for democratic institutions in the US and overseas; what impact Snowden's revelations had on individual freedoms and personal privacy and technical detail as to how the NSA's surveillance programmes operated (and how to circumvent them). Moreover, there were attempts – albeit limited – visible in the data to deterritorialise *The Guardian's* choreographing of the media assemblage, such as the complaint by the British politician, Tom Watson, of *The Guardian* “selling” its rendering of the story, rather than reporting it (Tom Watson, 2013).

However, it is not simply the case that the economically materialist dynamics of the media industry are responsible for *The Guardian's* choreography of the #AskSnowden assemblage. It is also important to recognise that this was achieved as part of a two-pronged strategy that used digital media and online networks to both choreograph, territorialise and code the media frame around the #AskSnowden story *and then* disseminate that media frame around the world using globalised media networks. As identified above, the first of such strategic moves was made by *The Guardian's* overt enrolment of online networks into the story. By opening up the Q&A web chat to Twitter users already engaged in following and debating Snowden's revelations via various hashtags and building its own community within the dedicated live-blog platform on its website established to host the debate, *The Guardian* explicitly adopted tactics designed to maximise participation.

Firstly, the newspaper offered networked media actors an exclusive opportunity to help it co-create (and, thus, territorialise the story. This leverages the non-market currency of social capital, arguably the primary motivation for choreographing online networks (Benkler 2006: 95; 117). Secondly, *The Guardian* adopted a much more contemporary tactic to drive participation by networked actors: it established itself as what appears to be a digitally-native news platform (i.e. its live-blog and web chat) within a networked online environment helping it earn credibility and trust among broader networks of informal online media actors. In turn, this increased network actors' propensity to fulfil tasks outside of the scope of traditional news organisations including contributing to stories, fact-checking and distributing content (Thurman, 2013; Thurman & Walters, 2013).

From the media content analysis comparing networked communities' contributions to the live-blog and Twitter hashtag against *The Guardian*'s final selection of web chat questions put to Snowden, the evidence outlined in the section above suggests a strong divergence between online networks' interest in the democratic and privacy implications of the story as opposed to Snowden's personal motivations selected by *The Guardian*. This is reinforced by the over-representation of questions from *Guardian* journalists in the final web chat combined with the editing out of those from competitive media organisations. Taken together, this points to the fact that there is a distinct commercial agenda driving the choreography and territorialisation of the media assemblage, ultimately coding the media frame as a 'soft news'-based celebrity whistleblower story. As a consequence, it can be argued that such evidence represents more closely the narrow, selective, commercially-driven media production and distribution model of traditional, institutional media power, rather than the more open, networked, collaborative, socially-driven and non-market motivated media power idealised in concepts such as "networked journalism" (Jarvis, 2006b) and the "networked public sphere" (Benkler, 2006: 10-12).

While these findings are useful in pointing out some of the limitations with optimistic accounts of digitally-networked media power (Bimber, 2003; Bennett, 2003b; Castells, 2009; McNair, 2006) or conversely providing an account of the opportunities for the digital renewal of institutional media power (Anderson *et al.*, 2012; Chadwick and Collister, 2014)], it can be further argued that *The Guardian* not only exerts a contemporary media power to enrol and choreograph networked actors in territorialising and coding the #AskSnowden media frame but moreover uses the same networks in marketing and promotion of *The Guardian* – further supporting its commercial agenda (Chadwick and Collister, 2014: 2434).

Based on this evidence it can be argued that the coded #AskSnowden media frame choreographed and territorialised by *The Guardian* is heavily influenced by an economic materialism. This can be interpreted in symbolic terms – that is, the way media content produced and published diverges from the democratic and privacy interests of the networked media actors and instead territorialises the story around a soft, 'human interest' news agenda. It can also be understood from a digital materialist perspective in that *The Guardian* is able to leverage its organisational resources and capital to build its own digital platform, arguably making it easier for

*The Guardian* to design and control the technological affordances at play. This enables it to choreograph the flow of media objects in, and around, the story.

As a consequence, by territorialising the media assemblage to its own agenda and coding the assemblage into a media frame advantageous to achieving commercial outcomes, the opportunity then emerges for *The Guardian* to leverage its network of engaged media actors to embed and distribute the coded media frame around the world through their own distribution networks. The impact of this can be recognised through the dominance of *The Guardian*'s soft news media frame appearing in analyses the Snowden story across the UK, US and Chinese media (Madison, 2014; Salvo & Negro, 2015: 7-9).

From the empirical evidence in the case study, then, it can be concluded that *The Guardian* exerts a contemporary media power. Moreover, the empirical evidence suggests that although *The Guardian* adopts a hybridised approach to news-gathering and media production, this is not choreographed by networks of informal media actors. Rather *The Guardian* uses its institutional resources and organisational power is used to out-flank (Clegg, 1989) informal networked information flows allowing it to choreograph and territorialise the media assemblage to its own – commercial - agenda.

Such results open up a number of interesting conclusions. It can be argued, for example, that while the analytical pillars of hybridity, materiality and choreography are all present in the creation of the #AskSnowden media assemblage, the dynamics through which it emerges and the role that these factors play in coding the assemblage into a media frame is predominantly determined by the institutional media actors in the case study. This is significant as it provides a counter-balance to the optimistic perspectives of media power which view digitally-networked media as possessing intrinsic potential for disruption and an upending of traditional, that is largely commercial (or state-based) motivations under-pinning media power (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2004; Benkler, 2006; McNair, 2006; Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009). Rather, the empirical evidence analysed in this chapter suggests that while contemporary media power is complex and emergent, it remains open to co-option and out-manoeuvring by institutional media and may well play a part in the media industries' wider renewal (Chadwick and Collister, 2014).

Recognising the potential for a reconfiguration of institutional power in networked societies, Castells (2009) has provided a useful approach to reading some of the phenomena discussed in relation to *The Guardian*'s possible adaptation and renewal. In *Communication Power* (2009) Castells asserts that:

In a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: (1) the ability to constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and (2) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation (Castells, 2009 45)

The two mechanisms in turn give rise to two types of power holders that are termed 'Programmers' and 'Switchers' respectively. Crucially, for Castells, "[s]witching and programming [...] networks are [...] forms of exercising power in our global network society" (*ibid.*: 52). Furthermore, Switcher and Programmer roles are not identifiable *a priori* owing to the complex material and human interactions within Latourian "actor-networks" (Latour cited in Castells 2009: 45). Thus, the act of programming and switching networks is wholly dependent on a range of forces and components (not purely economic ones) that are identifiable in each individual case.

By recognising the symbolic-material complexities of networked actors Castells' approach takes into account the fuller range of material (i.e. economic, technological, spatial, etc) components as well as the symbolic (image, text, interpersonal communication, etc) ones, thus moving beyond the symbolic-material (economic) dichotomy of previous analyses of the media industry. Crucially, such a notion helps confirm a central tent of the revised theory of media power established in *Chapter 2* of this thesis. Moreover, being able to locate and explore the current case study from the perspective of media actors operating as Switchers or Programmers can potentially add further detail to an understanding of how the dynamics of contemporary media power, identified as choreography and (de)territorialisation in the thesis' analytical model, operate.

For example, it can be argued that *The Guardian*'s choreography of media actors and media objects around the #AskSnowden story displays characteristics of both switching and programming. By establishing its own live-blog platform to host and

contain its web chat and creating and promoting the #AskSnowden hashtag on Twitter *The Guardian* effectively created a “cultural and organisational interface, a common language [and] a common medium” (Castells, 2009: 52) with which the networked actors discussing the Snowden story could coalesce.

Such an approach is essential, Castells argues, for switching networks and networked actors. In this instance, the case study evidence suggests that *The Guardian* designed the #AskSnowden initiative as a way to act as a focal point for – and ultimately to attract – the globally connected and ideologically diverse networks of actors. It is visible, for example, in the way *The Guardian* positions the web chat as an approach to news-making that explicitly seeks to integrate the wider networks of informal actors by telling the public, the web chat is the “interview the world's media organisations have been chasing for more than a week, but instead *Edward Snowden is giving Guardian readers the exclusive*” (Greenwald, 2013) [emphasis in original].

Such promotional language and design, it can be surmised, are planned to attract the public’s attention and ensure their awareness of, and participation in, the web chat and its rapid spread through digital networks. Beyond the way in which the interview is communicated, the titling of the web chat ‘#AskSnowden’ further demonstrates the ways in which *The Guardian* instinctively taps into and switches the prolific Twitter networks discussing the story to its own hashtag. Moreover, while it can’t directly control the conversations taking place on Twitter’s third-party platform, the creation of its own live-blog enables *The Guardian* to switch Twitter users (and other online actors) to its own, purpose-built online space.

Next, once these networks have been switched to the #AskSnowden web chat community, *The Guardian* then displays its network programming power to territorialise the media objects being created and shared to territorialise the assemblage and code a soft-news media frame – which is arguably more appealing to the public and therefore commercially appealing to *The Guardian* (Marsh, Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011). Such programming can be seen in the way that, although it encourages networked actors to ask Snowden “*anything*” (Greenwald, 2013) [emphasis added], the empirical analysis of the case study suggests that *The Guardian* selectively chooses a narrower range of topics suited to its interests than those posed by the switched networks.



Moreover, *The Guardian* then uses this ‘soft’ media frame to choreograph and program the networked media actors it has switched to further promote *The Guardian*’s content and its role as a public interest news producer. This is achieved by leveraging the networks’ interest in the #AskSnowden story as hard-news and political reporting *par excellence* and encouraging the networks to share and distribute *The Guardian*’s commercially advantageous narrative to a global audience under the guise of public interest journalism, ultimately strengthening *its* commercial position in a highly competitive business environment and suggesting that an economic materialist logic continues to influence and shape the seemingly socially-motivated, networked public sphere (Benkler 2006: 2-7).

While this may be partly accounted for by the “digital savviness” expected of its journalists by *The Guardian* (Wing, 2010), it can also be aligned with *The Guardian*’s organisational legacy context (outlined above) whereby throughout its history it has sought to use innovation to overcome challenging economic conditions. The same can be argued here, as, Viner notes: “the business model of most digital news organisations is based around clicks [and] frenzied binge-publishing, in order to scrape up digital advertising’s pennies and cents” (Viner, 2016). The empirical evidence analysed in this chapter arguably demonstrates that *The Guardian* was shrewdly blurring its commercially-motivated media production practices with its public interest journalism in order to ensure the organisation’s financial viability (Chadwick and Collister, 2014: 2432).

In fact, *The Guardian*’s enrolment and co-option of digital networks in pursuit of commercial motivations while creating the semblance of grassroots, networked and collaborative news-production (Charlie Beckett & Robin Mansell, 2008; Jarvis, 2006b) may indicate a further interesting feature of contemporary media power. That is, despite arguments for the democratising and emancipatory effects of digitally-networked media identified in *Chapter 2*, instead of becoming transformed by non-market-oriented networks of media actors, traditional economic materialist motivations of corporate media have instead begun to adapt to the contemporary media landscape and, moreover, have co-opted, switched and (re-)programmed public interest news production as a commercially-motivated soft news, confirming some critical scholars’ early hypotheses (Dean, 2010; Terranova, 2004; Vujnovic *et al.*, 2010).

Despite this reading, however, Castells is clear that within networks “there is no unified power elite capable of keeping the programming and switching operations of all-important networks under its control” (Castells 2009: 47). This further renders a straight-forward interpretation of the space where the commercial logic of legacy media meets networked media problematic. Rather, “more subtle, complex, and negotiated systems of power enforcement must be established” (*ibid.*). This is visible in the #AskSnowden case study, for example, when within *The Guardian*’s live-blog community there is evidence of meta-discussions taking place where individual users initiate and choreograph their own debates, share information and generally help each other make sense of – that is, territorialise - the wider story (Erikson, 2013; Hunt, 2013; Smyth, 2013). Similarly, a variation of this phenomenon can be identified in the Twitter network. Rather than sharing or forwarding content about or generated by *The Guardian*, a number of actors try to choreograph their own discussions and, significantly, attempt to *de-territorialise* *The Guardian*’s choreography of the story and its promotion by injecting inane, facetious and humorous questions into the hash-tagged content.<sup>47</sup>

From *The Guardian*’s perspective, too, there is evidence that the economic influence on the territorialisation and coding of the #AskSnowden media frame is not as intentional as it might appear. Rather the legacy institutional processes and wider economic motivations of the hyper-competitive news industry may act as determining forces in the choreography of the media assemblage. For example, interviews with employees of *The Guardian* suggest that its standard practice for gathering news content from networked actors were not shaped by particular editorial or commercial agendas (Cummins, 2016; Freeman, 2016). Furthermore, as Bimber has demonstrated, the disruptive potential of networked communications means that even institutions with the best intentions of integrating networks into non-networked legacy processes effectively are likely to find this difficult (Bimber, 2000).

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<sup>47</sup> Taking this further, such content could, perhaps, be seen as a strategic deployment of trolling (the act of intentionally offending or upsetting internet users) in order to switch the Guardian dominated network back to the non-market driven grassroots. Strategically planned uses of trolling have been recently noted for political purposes. See: (Seddon, 2015; Spruds *et al.*, 2016).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, then, the empirical analysis conducted in this chapter indicates that the choreography and territorialisation of the #AskSnowden case study into a coded media frame is shaped predominantly by formal media actors and institutional media imperatives. Thus, the evidence of contemporary media power primarily appears to be shaped by an economic materialism, *despite* the enrollment in the media assemblage of hybridised networks of informal media actors motivated by non-market forces. While the commercial motivations of news and media production and its relationship with media power is not a new scholarly notion (indeed, Marx and Engels noted such a relationship (Marx and Engels, 1932)) the empirical evidence analysed in this chapter allows a re-interpretation of these dynamics as more complex and nuanced factors influencing media power.

Crucially, however, while the empirical evidence in the case study recognises the continued importance of economic materialism in shaping the coded media frame, this materialism nevertheless works within a hybrid media landscape where media power is diffused through digitally-networked actors and contingently shaped by technological affordances. This enables a move beyond deterministic approaches to economic materiality within the context of contemporary media power.

Similarly, there are also attempts in the case study where informal, networked media actors to reterritorialise the #AskSnowden media assemblage by creating their own “cultural and organisational interface[s]” (Castells, 2009: 45). This is achieved through the formation of “hard news” meta-communities within *The Guardian*’s live-blog or adoption of Twitter trolling as a cultural phenomenon to disrupt *The Guardian*’s promotional content. Thus, although it can be concluded firmly from analysis of the empirical data that contemporary media power in the case study is influenced by the economic materialism of *The Guardian*’s institutional legacy, it is important to recognise that the data also suggests that *The Guardian*’s economic motivations do not have an *a priori* advantage in the choreography and territorialisation of the coded #AskSnowden media frame.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusions and Future Research Directions**

This thesis set out to make an original contribution to knowledge by advancing both a new theoretical perspective *and* empirical exploration of the field of contemporary media power. It aimed to do this by answering three research questions: 1) what could a revised theory of media power look like given the transformations that have occurred within the media landscape over recent years? 2) can an analytical model be developed that will allow researchers to effectively identify and analyse contemporary media power? 3) can the analytical model of contemporary media power developed in RQ2 be validated through empirical analysis? This chapter will firstly review the thesis' original contribution to knowledge by reviewing each chapter and how each of the research questions have been answered. Secondly, it will provide a discussion of findings and highlight potential directions for future research.

### **Main findings of the thesis**

#### *A revised theory of contemporary media power*

In addressing the thesis' first research question a review of relevant literature examining conceptual developments in both political, sociological and philosophical approaches to power and media power was undertaken. This review highlighted the convergences and divergences between each field with the resulting assessment being used to establish a 'shape' – that is, the constituent parts, operational forces and boundaries - of what a contemporary theory of media power might look like.

The first step in developing this revised theory of media power was to establish how media power is currently understood. *Chapter 1* provided the definition of media power adopted in the thesis as a “definitional, analytical, and interpretive authority” (Freedman, 2015: 273) that functions by processing and creating meaning within society (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 27) and, ultimately, “by framing what we take in, providing context and understanding and creating understandings that shape attitudes and action” (Russell, 2016: 143). Building on this definition the ways in which media power operates was reviewed to map “the relationships—between actors, institutional structures, and contexts—that organise the allocation of the symbolic resources necessary to structure our knowledge about [...] the world around us (Freedman, 2014: 274).

Taking these foundations as representative of the boundaries and constituent parts of media power, *Chapter 2* surveyed the broader political, sociological and philosophical traditions of power and discussed their inter-relation with the development of approaches to media power. This review argued that discussions of media power have largely remained locked in the liberal-critical dichotomy. As Gillespie, Boczkowski & Foot (2014) have noted “[m]ore often than not” media power scholarship has “borrowed conceptual and theoretical lenses developed in earlier studies of traditional print and broadcast media” (Gillespie, Boczkowski & Foot, 2014: 2).

To move beyond such a perspective, a revised theory of media power was developed addressing the above concerns. Firstly, given the rapid rise of digitally-networked media the thesis builds on Chadwick’s exploration of an “increasingly congested, complex, and polycentric [...] hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2013) in which older, traditional and newer, digital media logics and actors inter-relate, rather than supersede one another. As identified in *Chapter 2* this shift in the context of media power from a formal, institutionally dominated media landscape to a hybridised, polycentric one where the ability to produce, distribute and consume media – and thus the potential to exert media power – has become diffused across the social realm represents one of the over-arching characteristics of contemporary media power.

Chapter 2 also articulates an account of hybridity as the shift from mass communication to mass self-communication (Castells, 2009) – or more specifically, the move from a “mass media” to “networked media” logic. This is typified as a coming together of institutionally-coordinated formal media actors producing media content according to rigid news values designed to appeal to mass audiences (Curran, 2003; Benkler, 2006: 176-180) with more fluid, networks of informal media actors producing media content largely selected according to personal (or wider group) interests.

In this context, the scalability and speed of media content distribution becomes transformed based on the size, inter-connectedness and personal commitment of networked, informal media actors which, when compared to the often bureaucratic or commercial models of formal media, can produce and share media content more rapidly than mass media logics traditionally allow (Klinger and Svensson, 2014). Moreover, this quantitative shift is premised on a qualitative change in media

production motivations. As noted above, whereas institutional media are motivated and structured around commercial or public interest effects, the informal networks of digitally-enabled media production are much more motivated by social or cultural drivers (Benkler, 2006).

The second major divergence between social power and media power identified in *Chapter 2* and which required resolving was the importance of a neo-materialism. This was addressed by developing an approach to media power that takes account of both the symbolic as well as material aspects of media – their “front-end” and “back-end” (Russell, 2016: 149). The thesis argues that a range of material qualities need to be incorporated in a contemporary theory of media power, including algorithms, hyperlinks, bodily interaction and physical place and spaces.

The importance of such material qualities in contemporary society is addressed by Lash (2007) who highlights the increasing role of digital technology in shaping social relations. For example, to understand how media power is exerted in a digitally-networked society it is important to look beyond the creation and distribution of symbolic content. Rather, given the extent of media technologies adopted by formal and informal actors, media power can be said to operate according to (and in accordance with) parameters established by a range of context-dependent material objects and infrastructures. As a result, whereas media power was once exerted through the control or management of production, distribution or consumption of symbolic content produced by formal media actors and institutions, it now requires a more complex and fluid choreography (Gerbaudo, 2012) of symbolic content as well as the material relationships, physical infrastructures and digital technologies in the extended, networked social realm (Lash, 2007: 66).

By acknowledging the hybridity of media functioning across networks of older and newer, formal and informal actors and organisational structures as well as the contextually dependent affordances generated by media’s materiality, the thesis next developed an analytical model with which to empirically analyse and validate this revised account of media power.

#### *An analytical model of contemporary media power*

Having mapped out the potential shape of contemporary media power, next the thesis sought to develop an analytical model which I could test with empirical evidence. In

answering this research question the ontological status of contemporary media power was presented and developed using the neo-materialist notion of assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and Assemblage Theory (DeLanda, 2006) in particular. The ontological framework allows for the recognition of both the symbolic and material media objects operating in media production, distribution and consumption. It also allowed for the adoption of hybridised roles and behaviours of media actors across a spectrum of formal to informal. It focused on the ways media actors inter-relate, become enrolled in a media assemblage and organise symbolic and/or material media objects into coherent patterns through processes of (de)territorialisation. Finally, it allows us to account conceptually for the stabilisation of these networked actors, processes and objects into ‘coded’ media assemblages that provide a consistent and enduring interpretation of events.

Building on this conceptual context, the analytical model I operationalised in the thesis’ empirical analyses set out the *who*, *what*, *how* and *why* of contemporary media power and synthesised these into four central analytical pillars: hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding.

#### *Empirically validating contemporary media power*

The third and final research question addressed in the thesis was whether the revised theory of contemporary media power developed in RQ1 can be validated through empirical analysis using the analytical model in *Chapter 3*. This analysis was undertaken in *Chapters 4, 5 and 6* where three case studies were investigated through ethnographic, media content and interview data based on the four pillars of the analytical model – hybridity, materiality, choreography and coding.

I now review the role played by each of the pillars in the case studies and the scale at which they operated.

### **Hybridity, Materiality, Choreography and Coding in Action Across the Three Case Studies**

#### *Hybridity*

The case studies’ empirical findings confirm the presence of media hybridity. Information flows from, and among, digitally-networked participants were interpolated into formal news reporting and media production through relations of



interdependence among traditional institutional and informal actors. This builds on and augments other scholars' work exploring such emerging media practices in other contexts, such as collaborative news production using information sourced or "mined" from digitally-networked flows (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Chadwick, 2013; Hermida, 2012; Malika & Pfeffera, 2016; Martin, Corney, & Goker, 2015; Vis, 2013; Wall & Zahed, 2015). For example, the Demo2012 case study offers an analysis of the specific practices deployed by the NUS to strategically influence the public and political agenda by choreographing the media assemblage through formal methods (such as press releases, 'newsworthy' surveys and exclusive media briefings) as well as the engagement and coordination of more informal, networked media actors, such as local student unions, affiliated institutional actors and sympathetic online networks (Pool, 2014).

In addition, the Demo2012 case study also provides insight on the ways through which the institutional media reported the NUS's initial position and the subsequent demonstration in real-time through the use of live-blogs, which acted as a clearing house for informal and formal media content produced during the demonstration. On this point, the case study reveals two significant empirical findings that demonstrate the tension between attempts to choreograph dynamic and fluid networks of informal media actors.

On the one hand the NUS established a formal relationship with *The Guardian's* live-blogging team which meant that the NUS' media team agreed to cross-promote *Guardian* live-blog content to its own informal networks (*ibid.*). This reciprocal relationship is mutually beneficial in that it enables *The Guardian* to extend the reach of its news content among informal networks while helping the NUS to territorialise the media assemblage towards its own agenda through the selection and re-circulation of pro-demonstration content.

On the other hand, however, the case study demonstrates how the NUS' formal media actors struggled to react effectively to the negative shift in sentiment towards the NUS curated by the live-blog and other sources of real-time reporting. This began to deterritorialise the hitherto pro-NUS media assemblage. Furthermore, at the pivotal moment when participants were directed away from the symbolically powerful space of the Houses of Parliament the informal networks of actors

catalysed the anti-NUS content and begin *re-territorialising* the media assemblage against the NUS.

As the diverse sources of informal, online networked actors started producing high volumes of critical content outside of the NUS' formal control the earlier effective plan to coordinate such networks failed and *The Guardian's* live-blog, initially connected to the NUS' social media management, became a clearing house for informal media content dominated by an anti-NUS agenda. As a result, according to the NUS' Press Officer, despite their best efforts to mitigate the situation, *The Guardian's* live-blog effectively enrolled a vast array of fluid, networked content which eventually coded the media assemblage into an enduring and stable media frame ultimately critical of the NUS and #Demo2012.

If #Demo2012 offers a detailed account of informal-formal media actor interaction as a central feature of the case study, the Adidas and animal rights activists case study in *Chapter 5* further reinforces its importance. The aim of activists here was to highlight animal abuse by local authorities ahead of the Euro 2012 football championships by targeting corporate sponsors to generate public and media interest in the story. Although the activists' campaign was well-planned, the effective coding of the media assemblage and creation of a media frame was the result of hybridised actions by networked activists and Adidas' corporate response combined with the unforeseen effects of Facebook's algorithms.

For example, the activists' initial actions on Facebook were arguably successfully contained by Facebook's technological infrastructure in that its algorithms inadvertently minimised the visibility of the activists' complaints. Similarly, Adidas' behaviour as a corporate entity meant that while it dealt with the activists' concerns, it could not respond as quickly and efficiently as would have been expected by the logics of digitally-networked media. Moreover, the organisation leveraged its institutional power to request a specialist consultancy to conduct due diligence research on the crisis in order to shape Adidas' response. Given the digitally-led nature of the campaign, the consultancy used tools making use of algorithms to fully understand its 'digital footprint' and make recommendations that no significant response was required.

Up to this point, the activists' campaign and Adidas' response was working efficiently to territorialise and then de-territorialise the media assemblage first in favour of one group and then another. These events were, however, catalysed by Facebook's moderation algorithm which created the appearance of Adidas' censorship of activists' voices (Indenbirken, 2011; Busch, 2011; Creazwo, 2011; Gillich, 2011; Greye, 2011; Liller, 2011; Medienblase, 2011; Ponta, 2011; Vip, 2011). This created a wider network of bloggers and Twitter users who began publishing media content about the campaign and, in particular, Adidas' missteps. In turn, this extended interest via wider informal networks was identified by formal media actors (Meedia, 2011, 2011b, 2012; Busch, 2011; Handelsblatt, 2011a, 2011b) who then translated events into a clearly territorialised media assemblage which became coded against Adidas: the media frame defined the 'reality' that Adidas had mis-handled the crisis and censored activists' voices.

Finally, the #AskSnowden case study in *Chapter 6* provides insight into how a global news organisation used live-blogging, Twitter hashtags and a live web chat – all essential components of hybrid “networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006) – as part of a dedicated commercially-orientated plan to increase its audience. This was made possible firstly through the deployment of the media institutions' economic material resources to create a digital platform and hashtag which enabled it to gather globally dispersed and networked users in one place and then leverage them to territorialise the media assemblage for commercial aims.

Specifically, through its platform, *The Guardian* created a focal point around which networks of hybrid actors were choreographed to source crowd-based questions for the institution's Edward Snowden reporting. Crucially, the case study reveals how *The Guardian* used its platform and hashtag to generate an appearance of a credible networked actor through collaboratively producing news reporting while actually misrepresenting the views and interests of the wider network.

For example, while the top four themes of questions submitted to *The Guardian's* web chat platform by networked actors were as follows: 1) democratic implications of Snowden's leaks; 2) personal privacy concerns of citizens; 3) operational questions about NSA systems and software; and 4) personal questions directed to Snowden, the dominant theme of questions put to Snowden by *The Guardian's* reporters were focused on his personal life and status as a 'celebrity whistleblower'.

This suggests that despite *The Guardian*'s intentions of engaging in innovative networked journalism integrating hybrid networks into its reporting, the territorialisation and coding of the #AskSnowden media assemblage was organised around the commercial motivations of 'soft news'. As a consequence, one of the biggest 'hard news' stories of modern history (Chadwick & Collister, 2014: 2422) was framed as an entertainment and lifestyle story.

Furthermore, not only did *The Guardian* code the media assemblage as a soft news story, it then leveraged its relationships with the networks of informal media actors gathered on its own platform and hashtag to promote its own Snowden stories and web chat to a global audience. For example, of the tweets containing the #AskSnowden hashtag a majority (60 per cent) did not direct questions to Snowden as part of the web chat and, moreover, 63 per cent of these were promotional in content. That is, they explicitly made other networked actors aware of *The Guardian* live web chat with Edward Snowden and, significantly, helped drive website traffic to *The Guardian*'s live-blog platform by posting a web link to the Q&A.

In addition, 24 per cent of the tweets without questions for Snowden featured soundbites and quotations from *The Guardian*'s own coverage. This implies that even if Twitter users did not click through to the web chat itself via a tweet, they were at least exposed to *The Guardian*'s content. This challenges more optimistic readings of such networked behaviour in territorialising and coding media assemblages. It suggests that commercial imperatives or institutional structures can effectively choreograph networks of media actors, while giving the appearance of being public-interest motivated behaviours.

### *Materiality*

The materiality of media found in the case studies played a part in shaping the (de)territorialisation and coding of media assemblages. This occurred through a range of different materialities, such as the built-environment and bodily interaction, media technological and economic materialism. One of the most prevalent material features identified and documented in the case studies was the role of new media platforms in influencing the ways hybridised actors constitute and choreograph networked media.

Across all of the case studies real-time information gathering and live-blogging (Thurman, 2013; Thurman & Walters, 2013) were adopted by both formal and informal media actors to shape the visibility, production, distribution and consumption of media content which, in due course, influenced the coding of each media assemblage and the ultimate media frame produced.

For example, *The Guardian*, as an institutional media actor, was able to build and deploy its own formal live-blogging platform used in both the Demo2012 and #AskSnowden case studies. This approach – in turn made possible by the institution's commercially-supported economic resources – enabled *The Guardian* to publish high-quality and professionally produced information curated from networks of informal media actors. Moreover, this gave *The Guardian* greater control in determining the context in which this networked information was received.

The Demo2012 live-blog allowed *The Guardian* to earn credibility as a networked news actor by linking to and sharing informal networked content. At the same time, it enabled *The Guardian* to promote other relevant *Guardian* content by providing related content to readers. This approach, which leverages the social capital at the heart of hybrid, digitally-networked media in order to maximise commercial impact, was refined and further deployed in the #AskSnowden case study. In that case, networked actors were enrolled into *The Guardian*'s reporting in order to earn the organisation media credibility which it could then leverage to distribute and promote its story to a global audience for free.

At the other end of the spectrum, a number of informal media actors who live-blogged on publicly-available platforms about the animal rights campaign against Adidas were also pivotal in connecting the activists' niche, targeted Facebook campaign with a wider network of media actors. In turn, this real-time commentary and reporting helped catalyse a crisis in which both of the protagonists were evenly matched in (de)territorialising the media assemblage into a much bigger story with widespread public visibility and – ultimately – a heavily territorialised and coded media assemblage critical of Adidas.

Evidence for this is visible in the fact that the media bloggers were instrumental in understanding and translating the significance of the activists' accusations that Adidas was censoring online debate. While the institutional media may have been

aware of the wider campaign against UEFA's sponsors it was the informal network of media bloggers that were able to spot the newsworthy development in relation to Adidas' alleged actions which in turn led to the wider media interest.

Moreover, there is additional evidence that this informal live-blogging further shaped the final media frame at a micro-level. The language used by live-bloggers went on to inform the language used by institutional media to report and frame the story. Content analysis shows a correlation between the informal media content which appeared initially on 21<sup>st</sup> November and was subsequently followed by news coverage of the story on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Moreover, it was this informal media content that singled out Adidas for criticism and started using the term 'shitstorm' to describe the campaign, which remained targeted at all UEFA sponsors. Both of these developments were present in the media content analysis I performed on the resulting institutional media content.

Crucially, then, the practice of real-time media publication (and live-blogs as a specific media production and distribution function) gave networked media actors the advantageous ability to draw on real-time flows of information emerging around a news event, interpret and analyse it and shape its representation and – ultimately – reception. Central to this were the digital media platforms and their associated search functions, which enabled informal media actors to track and collate events or issues as they emerged, collate and select related content and publish and distribute new media content at a global scale.

In many of these instances, the collection, filtering and presentation of data in these platforms is performed by proprietary algorithms unseen by those making use of the software. Individuals may therefore be unaware of the potential impact these material factors may have on the interpretation of information. In the animal rights campaign case study, for example, software algorithms were put to use by Adidas' media consultancy in order to search for and analyse the large quantities and diverse qualities of the information being produced by the activists – and broader networks of actors - as part of the campaign. The resulting information was used to make sense of the direction and scale of the unfolding crisis and to enable Adidas to make fully informed and strategic decisions in its response (McCarthy, 2015; Robinson, 2015). In the same case study, however, algorithms also exerted non-human agency in shaping the representation and reception of information in the Facebook newsfeed.

By design, Facebook's Edgerank algorithm down-weighted information published by official brand pages (Facebook, 2015; Oremus, 2016), thus the activists tactical approach flooding of Adidas' Facebook page with critical messages generated little impact on the organisation (McCarthy, 2015).

The presence of such seemingly autonomous algorithms as central features of the media and communications environment is growing and increasingly being adopted by media actors as digital short-cuts to determine objectively news-worthy events (Chakraborty, Ghosh, Ganguly, & Gummadi, 2015; Thurman et al, 2016). The nature and function of such algorithms are increasingly being questioned and challenged, however, as complex socio-technical features incorporating human oversight, subjective analysis and computational processes. Thus, the role of these unseen computational processes raises conceptual questions (as well as practical challenges) to media actors and researchers. The alternative to making use of such algorithmic tools and methods, however, is similarly problematic.

For instance, in the #AskSnowden case study *The Guardian* created online networks - within its own live-blog and through the use of a twitter hashtag - as a news-gathering and, ultimately, promotional resource. While some scholars see this formal-informal media actor interaction as a positive and productive relationship in news-making (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Gillmor, 2006; Jarvis, 2006; N. Newman, Dutton, & Blank, 2012), the sheer scale of *The Guardian's* initiative meant that accurate and representative selection of information could only fully have been achieved through the use of sense-making digital analytics tools.

The case study, however, suggests that such tools are not routinely adopted by *The Guardian* as the digital interface between grassroots networks of informal media actors and professional journalists. Instead, the questions selected for inclusion in the #AskSnowden web chat over-represented *Guardian* journalists. Content analysis of the final 20 web chat questions selected for answer by Snowden reveals that two were drawn from the 17,176 tweets published with the #AskSnowden hashtag, 13 were drawn from the 3,845 live-blog comments while the remaining five were asked directly by *The Guardian's* own journalists. Moreover, the final 20 questions selected diverged significantly from the dominant themes of the questions actually asked by the broader networked actors. Thus, it can be argued, traditional newsroom routines prevailed in interpreting and making sense of the networked information

flows where algorithmic interpretation of the data – while available – was not adopted.

The materiality of media technologies also includes the metadata contained within the vast volumes of symbolic content produced and shared by informal and formal media actors. This type of data – often hidden or unseen by users - expresses information pertaining to the physical environment, such as a user’s location, the date and time as well as the type of device being used. Mobile devices’ affordances for producing, sharing, consuming and searching for information in close to real-time creates rapid feedback cycles that enable individual and collective actions in physical space to be tracked and represented remotely (Boczkowski, 2010; N. Newman, 2011; Revers, 2015). Conventional notions of the separation of digital and physical domains become problematic: the digital networked world becomes intertwined with everyday practices of the physical world (Frith, 2015: 2; Revers, 2015: 6).

In this sense, digitally-networked mediation can be understood as a locative media production process (Evans, 2015; Frith, 2015; Wilken & Goggin, 2014). There are material behaviours and practices in the physical realm of place and space, but the representation of place and space is mediated in an ongoing, inter-related exchange of meaning. Thus, digitally networked communication exerts a “dynamic temporality” (Sheller, 2015: 20), which creates distinct spaces of media and news production. These spaces are increasingly shaped by digital platforms and the technological infrastructure that surrounds them (Revers, 2015: 18).

Such a phenomenon could be observed in the Demo2012 case study where a group of demonstrators, dissatisfied with the organisers’ route directing them away from the Houses of Parliament (London’s historical centre of political protest), initiated a spontaneous sit-down protest blocking the official route and attempting to force participants back to Parliament. Moreover, at the end of the demonstration a group of anti-NUS activists interrupted the official speeches from NUS spokespeople and high-profile supporters by heckling, throwing eggs and invading the stage forcing the rally – the planned (and strategically staged) culmination of Demo2012 – to be abandoned. This additional physical action switched the demonstration’s official space and was designed to create a sense of symbolic significance for the demonstrators and assembled media as they moved against the NUS (Hoyles, 2014).

The materiality of these physical actions noticeably shifted the territorialisation of



the media assemblage. Ultimately it led to a coding of the media assemblage and established a frame critical of the NUS. This was achieved when critical symbolic content was produced by informal actors participating in the demonstration – in part through their interaction with the materiality of the physical environment. It enabled the wider sharing of their dissatisfaction with the NUS through their own media networks. This was subsequently integrated by formal, institutional media actors who, in turn, adapted their reporting to reflect the criticism of the NUS.

One final material factor influencing the ways in which the three case studies' media assemblages are produced, (de)territorialised and coded is economic: commercial imperatives and financial motivations. These were particularly notable in the #AskSnowden case study where, despite the overt attempt by *The Guardian* to adopt a non-market network logic (Benkler, 2006: 2-7) in its reporting of a significant political 'hard news' story, the final coded, media frame defined the story through a 'soft news' focus (Marsh, Hart, & Tindall, 2010; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011; West & Orman, 2002). Such an outcome was arguably motivated by the commercial imperative to ensure sales, rather than social capital (Benkler, 2006: 7) – although, as discussed in the case study analysis, *The Guardian* used the language of social responsibility to promote the story.

The economic imperatives of soft news were also visible in more peripheral ways in both the Demo2012 and animal rights activist case studies. For example, analysis of the media content produced and distributed ahead of the 2012 demonstration focused on hard news angles, such as higher education policy, the impact of higher education funding cuts on the availability of education and student employment opportunities (ITV News, 2012; Chessum, 2012; Walker & Ratcliffe, 2012). Despite the extensive planning by the NUS (Hoyles, 2014) designed to ensure 'on message' hard-hitting, political reporting ahead of the demonstration, the resulting news coverage prominently featured visual imagery illustrating the 'hard news' news content with "riot porn" (Aguayo, 2014; Rasza, 2014), i.e. sensationalist images of vandalism and violence, which had occurred during previous NUS events. Such a divide between policy-focused stories and sensationalist images can arguably be explained by a commercially-oriented, soft news imperative focused on presenting serious reporting as eye-catching and promotional content in order to increase readerships.

Similarly, while the animal rights activists in the Adidas case study sought to highlight state-sanctioned animal abuse and challenge public opinion (Anis, 2011;

Casabianca, 2011), the media reporting of the story focused almost entirely on the ways in which the high-profile, consumer brand responded to the campaign. Such a news angle was a way for media to address the hard news story intended by the activists through a softer lens, diminishing the challenging aspects of the story in order to ensure higher commercial success of news content.

Economic materialism also shaped the territorialisation of media assemblages through indirect means. For example, while the technological requirements necessary to set-up a blog for the collation of real-time information are minimal (Carlson, Djupsund, & Strandberg, 2014: 21-22), there remains, nonetheless, the need to provide resources to manage and coordinate the live-blog, track information flows, source appropriate material, publish and respond to interaction from the relevant networks. Such capacity arguably requires individuals with sufficient economic resources to volunteer their time – or makes it more likely that such platforms will be created and managed by media actors with commercial motivations. Significantly, empirical evidence supporting this phenomenon is identifiable in all three case studies - and across both the formal and informal domains of hybrid networks.

While a number of other formal media actors, including *The Guardian*, the *BBC* and *East London Lines* (Howell, 2012; Owen, 2012; Ryan & Sellgren, 2012) adopted live-blogs to undertake real-time reporting of the Demo2012 protest, perhaps most interestingly the animal rights campaign case study reveals how economic imperatives also played a part in shaping the territorialisation and coding of the media assemblage by informal media actors.

As noted above, the catalyst for the activists' campaign reaching wider, institutional media networks was a small number of informal actors working in the media and/or marketing industry who spotted the alleged censorship of activists by Adidas and blogged and tweeted their own analysis of the development. Significantly, analysis of the sources of this content reveals that many of these informal actors were freelance consultants or journalists likely to be using their blogs and Twitter feeds to provide analysis and commentary about topical issues in order to promote themselves and – ultimately – secure new customers or readers. Thus, the informal media actors amplifying the activists' campaign and catalysing the media assemblage's coding against Adidas were also driven by commercial and self-promotional motives rather than ethical or public interest motives.

It is important to note, however, that while the economic context is an important factor shaping the (de)territorialisation and coding of the various media assemblages, its ability to determine outcomes—as hypothesised by some scholars (Curran & Witschge, 2010; Dahlberg, 2005; Hargittai, 2006; Hindman, 2008)—is rendered problematic by the highly-contingent nature of media assemblages. In the Demo2012 case study, for example, while the commercial media used sensationalist imagery to create a soft news frame around a policy-focused issue (Chessum, 2012; Walker & Ratcliffe, 2012) there is additional evidence that activist networks circulated the same imagery as a way to galvanise supporters and generate a sense of solidarity based on the political revival among student groups created by the vandalism and violence of the previous NUS event (Lloyd, 2012; Margeson, 2012; Rhianr, 2012).

Similarly, while *The Guardian* established a soft news frame around #AskSnowden to help promote itself through digital networks further media content data suggests that a significant number of actors within *The Guardian*'s own #AskSnowden community shared disruptive content using the #AskSnowden hashtag in an attempt to undermine the promotional nature of *The Guardian*'s content. Thus, while economic materialist factors influence and shape networked media environments, in keeping with the emergent and relational nature of the theoretical framework underpinning the thesis the reality is that this is a subtle and negotiated process (Castells, 2009: 47).

### *Choreography*

As defined in *Chapter 3*, choreography can be understood as the ways in which networked actors coordinate themselves (Gerbaudo, 2012: 134-135) or as protocols governing the emergence and organisation of networks (Castells, 2009: 56; Chadwick, 2007). As a consequence, choreography shapes information flows and influences media production, distribution and consumption which in turn impacts on processes of (de)territorialisation and the coding of media assemblages and thus media power.

Arguably, choreography is a process emerging from the interaction between individual or collective agency (human and non-human) as well as material media objects. As Castells has asserted: the ability to coordinate networks is exerted by the “*networks themselves*” [emphasis in original] (Castells, 2009: 45). This implies that

while networks through their form reject direct central coordination, a form of coordination is possible through indirect means, such as communal and collective behaviours, expressions of intent or shared meaning.

It is essential, however, to recognise that such an approach to organisation and coordination is predicated fundamentally on the complex, emergent interaction and inter-relation between the range of formal and informal media actors and the media objects being produced, shared and consumed within those networks. It also depends on the material infrastructures that shape information flows within networks. While economically well-resourced actors are more likely to possess the ability to dominate communication, and thus direct or choreograph networks, this is not always the case.

It is possible to identify some of the dominant ways in which actor networks were choreographed at different points of their evolution in the three case studies I examined. For example, in the Demo2012 case study initially the NUS' formal media actors effectively choreographed the flow of information in the media assemblage because the build-up to the demonstration involved largely formal actors, such as journalists and affiliated institutions supporting the NUS' position. In this relatively stable network environment media objects were produced and distributed through established hybrid relationships with minimal disruption and this efficiently territorialised the media assemblage in the NUS' favour.

Once the demonstration got underway, however, and the critical materiality of the route became enrolled with anti-NUS activists, the NUS could not respond effectively. As a result, the spontaneous and event-driven choreography of informal media actors de-territorialised the media assemblage. This, combined with *The Guardian's* live-blog – a media form suited to capturing the live flows of information being produced by fluid, networked actors – helped crystallise the interpretation of events emerging from this (re)choreography and coded the media assemblage against the NUS.

Similarly, in the animal rights activists versus Adidas case study, both the activists and Adidas planned and deployed tactics typical of effective public awareness-raising campaigns and corporate crisis response. As a consequence, media content and interview data suggests that the media assemblage was territorialised, de-territorialised and re-territorialised to-and-fro between both sets of actors.

This situation was changed by the materiality of algorithms operating within the media networks. It was the algorithm's ability to operate in ways that were unseen and rapidly and adaptively to the behaviours exerted by the human actors in the media assemblage that were most effective in shaping the territorialisation of the media assemblage against Adidas. The outputs of this algorithmic choreography were then picked up by a wider, more publicly visible network of informal media actors who, crucially, were connected to institutional media actors who, in turn, further territorialised and coded the media assemblage to establish a frame that went against the interests of Adidas.

Finally, in the #AskSnowden case study free-flows of information from a range of formal and informal media actors were generated in response to the news story and web chat, but it can be argued that the driving force choreographing this network, and thus effectively shaping the territorialisation of the media assemblage, was the economic materialism of *The Guardian's* commercial strategy. Specifically, the materiality of *The Guardian's* technological infrastructure and journalistic resource was highly effective in shaping the production, distribution and consumption of media content around the story. This choreography was further used for the continued marketing of *The Guardian's* output around the story. This was successful despite some attempts by informal media actors critical of *The Guardian's* approach, who also sought to choreograph other like-minded actors to challenge *The Guardian's* reporting.

### *Coding*

The role of coding in my analytical model is to identify when a media assemblage becomes territorialised to such an extent that it achieves a consistent and stable identity beyond its individual components (DeLanda, 2006: 14-16) and thus comes to frame the event or issue around which the assemblage was created (Reese, 2001; Hertog & McLeod, 2001). This outcome effectively demonstrates when the definitional authority of media power is being exercised (Couldry and Curran, 2003; Freeman, 2014).

The presence of coded media assemblages is confirmed in each case study through quantitative analysis of the media content data. For example, Demo2012 was framed negatively against the aims of the organisers, despite the NUS' best efforts to

choreograph the media assemblage in support of its own agenda; the Adidas versus animal rights activists episode was framed in a way critical of Adidas, but in relation to the corporation's behaviour responding to the activists, rather than due to its involvement in the original animal rights issue. Finally the #AskSnowden case study framed the web chat with Edward Snowden around human interest issues, rather than the policy-based interests of the online community enrolled in the media assemblage.

In the Demo2012 case study, informal, networked media actors were able to outmanoeuvre and outflank the NUS, which had aimed to co-ordinate the event to achieve institutional outcomes (Clegg, 1989). Crucially, *The Guardian's* role in this media assemblage saw it function more like a networked actor – building its own platform to act as a node within the hybrid networks of informal and formal media actors and, ultimately, choreographing events much more efficiently than the NUS. Interestingly, while the NUS planned the event effectively, the emergence of human-interest issues – e.g. student dissatisfaction, spectacular scenes of protests outside the Houses of Parliament and personal attacks on the NUS president – were what really catalysed the widespread production and sharing of content. And while this was informal, networked media actors initially, these media objects were then enrolled by *The Guardian* and wider institutional media, effectively coding the media assemblage and defining the media frame against the NUS' agenda.

In the animal rights activists versus Adidas case study there was further evidence of informal, networked media actors outflanking a more bureaucratic institution. There was also, however, evidence of the organisation using its economic resource to employ a specialist consultancy to enable it to operate like a networked actor and to respond accordingly to the activists' networked choreography of events. While both these groups of actors territorialised and deterritorialised the media assemblage, they were both then out-flanked by the algorithmic infrastructure of the software tools and platforms being used.

Furthermore, despite the important 'hard news' issue of animal rights abuses being brought to light by the activists it was, arguably, the more sensationalist issue of a high-profile corporation such as Adidas appearing to censor activists' online comments which transformed the scale and rate of the territorialisation, as wider networks of informal and formal media actors became interested in the event and heavily territorialised the media assemblage around this development. This created a

coded media assemblage that critically framed Adidas, despite the fact that, in reality, this online ‘censorship’ was falsely produced by Facebook’s algorithms. Finally, in the #AskSnowden case study... The Guardian rapidly and efficiently choreographed hybrid networks of a diverse range of informal and formal actors to code the media assemblage around its Edward Snowden reporting to suit its own preferred outcomes. As discussed above, *The Guardian* was able to leverage its institutional position and economic resource to build a dedicated web chat platform to act as focal point for the story, as well as create and manage the dedicated #AskSnowden Twitter hashtag. This enabled it to leverage its commercially-supported resource of formal journalists to act as informal, networked media actors operating according to the principles of social responsibility. This meant *The Guardian* could territorialise and code the media assemblage in support of its own ‘soft news’ frame and, more strikingly, further choreograph the #AskSnowden network to amplify and promote *The Guardian* as a globally renowned example of public interest reporting.

In conclusion, a number of converging points arise in the coding of the media assemblages I examined in the three case studies. The networked behaviours and logics of informal media actors allow them to organisationally out-flank (Clegg, 1989) more institutional media actors in content production and distribution. Institutional actors are able to respond if they possess the necessary skills, tools and organisational processes, as did the NUS with its use of affiliated supporters and as did Adidas in its hiring of a specialist consultancy. However, this does not necessarily guarantee success in the longer term.

Another recurring theme across the case studies is that formal, institutional media still appear to perform an important role in enrolling media objects from the networks of informal media actors, interpreting and making sense of this dispersed content and, arguably, taking it to a wider mainstream public audience. Thus, while the emergence of important media objects and the choreography of media production and circulation can be initiated by informally networked media actors it is the enrolment of this content by institutional media actors which leads to the development of heavily territorialised and coded media assemblages.

Finally, a major driver of both networked interaction and media production and its enrolment by formal media actors is the human-interest frame. The choreography of

networked informal media production and distribution is motivated primarily by social capital, in that networks emerge from intrinsic motivations such as communicating with others and supporting each other in pursuit of culturally or socially specific shared interests (Benkler, 2006: 91-128). At the same time, as Gerbaudo has shown, networks establish the emotional narration of events required to bring individuals together to act (Gerbaudo, 2012: 12).

In all three case studies, these personal and socially-oriented motives converged with the commercial needs of institutional media to produce ‘soft news’ in the form of human interest or emotionally charged angles designed to appeal to readers. Somewhat paradoxically, the rise in digitally-empowered networks of informal media actors perceived by optimistic/liberal media power scholarship as a potent media counter-power (Bennett, 2003; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Castells, 2009: 299) appears to be aligned with a rise in institutional media’s interest in reporting sensational or human-focused soft news (Barnett, Gaber, & Ramsay, 2012; Cushion & Franklin, 2015; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011). Scholars might want to reconsider arguments relating to the ‘innately disruptive and ultimately empowering’ (Freedman, 2014: 7) potential afforded by ‘new technology’ (Kember and Zylinska, 2012: xiv; Chun, 2006: 9). Rather, we could be facing a recombination of media power by institutional media, who absorb and instrumentalise the strengths of informal, networked media actors.

### **Future Directions for Research**

This thesis has proposed a revised theoretical approach to media power in a networked environment. It has developed an analytical model with which to undertake empirical work and has used three diverse case studies to demonstrate the utility of the theoretical approach. I turn, finally, to how this thesis might contribute to further research in this field.

#### *Institutional Adaptation*

Despite predictions of a decline in the ability of institutional media to exert power to influence and define events in the public sphere (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016; Preston, 2016), the empirical evidence discussed above suggests that institutional media still play an important role in coding media assemblages.

Therefore, one direction for future research will be to investigate in greater detail the



qualitative changes occurring in institutional media production in the context of the revised theory and model of media power developed in this thesis. For example, do formal, institutional media operate on the same terms as other, informal networked media actors? That is, does the institutional role of traditional media organisations dissolve into media assemblages when its reporters and journalists participate in networked flows of information.

Alternatively, does the theory and model of contemporary media power set out here open up new opportunities, roles and practices for institutional media? For example, in each of the case studies, the institutional media (and in particular, *The Guardian*) played a decisive role in enrolling the diverse range of media content produced and shared through informal networks and in choreographing this information – often by leveraging economic resources. However, it is also important to note that this coding process would not have been possible without drawing on the media content already produced and choreographed by informal media actors.

Specific research opportunities could explore further the “institutional adaptation” (Chadwick and Collister, 2014: 2427) that some scholars have begun to identify within the field of media boundary-drawing (Carlson and Lewis, 2015). As has been identified in the empirical evidence in this thesis the increasingly hybridised media behaviours, the material role of economic resources and technology and the complex choreography of networked media actors all point to a period of “media instability” (Singer, 2015) where the boundaries of what can be consider formal or informal are breaking down. Given the continued role played by formal media institutions in this environment an important opportunity for future research by media power scholars could be to better understand where the boundaries of media institutions end and where they begin.

Specific questions could be addressed, such as how are institutions adapting their operations to newly networked, hybridised, material media environment? How do “new institutions become old and stable [and] old institutions become new and flexible?” (Anderson *et al.*, 2012: 47–48) and what does this mean for our understanding of contemporary media power?

Moreover, presuming this institutional transition is an ongoing process, how does it affect media power as it evolves? And, what does this evolution look like in a

comparative context given that different nations and/or markets around the world operate under different media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004)? Finally, building on this research trajectory, a further direction for future research can be identified by looking at this opportunity in reverse: how are the originally informal networks of media actors becoming formalised as institutions?

#### *'Soft News' and Emotionally-driven Media Power*

As discussed above, the empirical evidence in this thesis also suggests there is an overlap between the motivations of informal, networked media actors and formal, institutional ones in the form of human-interest, often emotionally-charged, 'soft news' (Barnett, Gaber, & Ramsay, 2012; Cushion & Franklin, 2015; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011). This presents an opportunity for future research as it appears that the values and logics of media production are converging, rather than diverging as suggested by previous networked media scholarship which asserted a hard distinction could be drawn between the motivations and consequences informal media actors motivated by social capital and formal media actors motivated by commercial outcomes (Benkler, 2006).

There are arguably a number of ways into this research space. For example, Singer (2015) has defined the emergence of an 'entrepreneurial journalism' which may be playing a more significant role in media production. This could be due to the commercial decline encountered by news institutions in a digital environment and the rise in 'freelance' journalists no longer employed by media publishers. These autonomous and financially precarious formal media actors are expected to compete with other as entrepreneurial reporters as well as informal media actors (Edmonds, Guskin, Mitchell, & Jurkowitz, 2013; Fleming, 2013; Rosenstiel, Jurkowitz, & Ji, 2012).

In this instance the 'entrepreneurial' media producer becomes more like an informal networked actor producing content that must engage and interest audiences by creating an affective response in order to generate clicks, 'Likes' and shares (Christin, 2014; Murtha, 2015) among the increasingly vast quantities of formal and informal media content being produced (Beckett and Deuze, 2016). This media behaviour and its associated logic shifts the focus of formal media production from "the public, the people who rely on me for credible information" to "my customers, the people whom I rely on to keep my journalistic enterprise going (and who also

continue to rely on me for the credible information that forms the basis of my enterprise)” (Singer, 2015: 17). As a consequence, it arguably closes the gap between the civic, fact-based quality reporting conventionally typified by the institutional media and populist, emotive or sensational content that will generate interest among the networked audience and, therefore, revenue for the producer (Beckett and Deuze, 2017; Boczkowski, 2010).

This development opens up a number of avenues for further exploration of contemporary media power. Specific questions include: how widespread is this shift in the behaviour and logics of ‘quasi-formal’ media entrepreneurs? Does it increase the significance of materialism in shaping the choreography and territorialisation of media assemblages – for example, although such media practices are arguably far-removed from traditional institutional forms, they nonetheless have an economic materialism at their core. Moreover, important questions need to be asked regarding the materiality of new, media technologies used by these entrepreneurial actors to identify popular or affectively effective stories on which they can capitalise. To what extent do actors test and improve the popularity of media content (and therefore improve its performance and thus revenue) through automatic and computationally-driven distribution and adaptation (Vermeire, 2017). Finally, a further issue is whether this shaping of symbolic media content to meet the popular or affective demands of networked media actors re-orient media values away from rational, fact-based content and toward sensationalist content – a scenario where the truth may become secondary to achieving clicks and shares.

#### *Media Power in a Post-Fact Era*

As institutional media adapt to the digitally-networked media environment and compete for attention among networked actors the role of emotion in shaping media production, distribution and consumption, according to Beckett and Deuze (2017) is “becoming a much more important dynamic in how news is produced and consumed” (Beckett and Deuze, 2017). My case studies demonstrate how assemblages can be territorialised and coded in ways that frame events or issues according to a more sensationalist or emotive angle. For example, in Demo2012 the media frame focused on the spectacle of the spontaneous protests, scuffles with police and the angry scenes at the rally culminating in the stage invasion. The Adidas case saw the activists’ campaign focusing on the apparent, but factually incorrect, account of Adidas’ censorship of activists’ posts. The #AskSnowden case saw the

predominantly hard news questions from readers framed as a ‘celebrity whistleblower’ story. As a result, the choreography and territorialisation of media assemblages does not necessarily follow rational or fact-based norms of traditional media power.

In foregrounding a non-rational, affective motivation in the coding of media assemblages and framing of events, the theoretical perspective on media power developed in the thesis offers an approach to understanding the role of media in what is now being called the ‘post-fact era’ (Maxmen, 2016; Renwick, Flinders, & Jennings, 2016). This conceptual turn is typified as a historical moment in which public debate and political engagement based on empirical evidence and verifiable facts is replaced with one premised on a rejection of expertise and a preference for sensationalist and emotive information (Colvile, 2016; Drezner, 2016).<sup>48</sup>

One potential consequence for scholars seeking to analyse and understand the way in which society makes sense of everyday events and choose appropriate actions is that they reframe their theoretical positions away from a normative, empirical rationalism and towards an affectively-driven or non-rational approach. Arguably, the theory and model of contemporary media power developed in this thesis can offer a framework for organising future research in this area. For example, the evidence that the hybridised networks of formal and informal media actors choreograph media production and distribution through “emotional scene-setting” (Gerbaudo, 2012: 12) could be a useful starting point to identify and understand how non-rational or affective media content becomes produced, distributed and consumed in order to code media assemblages and frame everyday events.

### *Computation and Algorithms*

Additionally, as identified in the empirical case studies in this thesis, the materiality of digital platforms being used by individuals and institutions to produce, distribute and consume media content raises questions for further research, specifically pertaining to the role of – the largely invisible - material forces such as algorithms and computational processes which play a part in influencing and shaping the (de)territorialisation and coding of media assemblages.

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<sup>48</sup> Although it can be argued that propaganda and misinformation has been in use for hundreds (Helfand, 2017), if not thousands, of years (Harris, 1989) the post-fact era sees the extension of non-rational information into mainstream communication and public debate.

The significance of such questions has been brought to the fore recently by the ways digital platforms have been applied in high-profile political campaigns to choreograph emotionally-driven information which has had a greater efficacy in coding media assemblages and framing events and issues to a non-rational – at times, even false – agenda. For example, both the 2016 United States Presidential Elections and Brexit Referendum campaigns used algorithms and computational data analysis of the kind identified in the case studies to choreograph and (de)territorialise the media assemblages more efficiently than opposing campaigns (James, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Wood, 2016). This arguably enabled the identification of networked individuals and groups affectively or culturally aligned with the campaign’s agenda to choreograph supportive media content (Halpern, 2017). Building on such initial evidence, the theory and model of contemporary media power could be used to explore further the role and significance of algorithms and approaches to political campaigning at a systemic level.

In both the examples cited above, two more detailed areas emerge as potential directions for future research. Firstly, specific questions and areas for further investigation arising from the above examples could include gaining a deeper understanding of ‘bots’ and their role in exerting media power. Bots are algorithms that can automate the dissemination of information to individuals and groups within online networks (Albright, 2016a). This automated process – identified as hyperintermediation in the Adidas case study (see *Chapter 6*) - can scale misleading and emotive content at a rate never previously possible. The velocity and scale of media production and dissemination could yield interesting new developments for the conceptualisation of media power in networked environments – particularly as the technology underpinning such processes evolves and starts to enable the creation of ever-more effective content (Albright, 2017).

Secondly, as identified in the case studies, when emotionally-charged content is consumed and re-shared by networked actors (both formal and informal) a further algorithmically-driven ‘multiplier effect’ can be observed. As affective content flows through and interacts with networked actors’ data signals are created that indicate to the digital platforms being used that the content – factual or otherwise – can be considered valuable and useful to the public. As a consequence, Facebook’s Newsfeed or Google’s PageRank algorithms, for example, improve the visibility of

the content within results or algorithmically-powered data streams (Manovich, 1999; 2012) creating a validation of emotionally-charged media content as relevant, legitimate news (Albright, 2016b; Ingram, 2016). The specific role that this infrastructure plays in influencing contemporary media power could be investigated in much greater detail – given its significance in choreographing and (de)territorialising the media assemblages analysed in this thesis.

This research can be further extended by exploring the relevance of economic materialism in shaping the motivations, development and deployment of such computational processes by digital platforms. For instance, Google, Facebook and Twitter all make use of algorithms to weight the visibility of media content flowing through their platforms as well as generate a commercial need for advertising across their networks. Thus, the effects of such material process on the choreography, (de)territorialising and coding of media assemblages could be intricately related to platforms' business models, which are primarily based on selling advertising inventory to commercial customers (Morris, 2016).

Undertaking such research, however, is also likely to present potential methodological challenges to researchers. As has been identified in this thesis the materiality of technological infrastructure and its effects on media production, distribution and consumption are often not as visible as, for example, the symbolic media content operating at the “front-end” of media power (Russell, 2016:149). Therefore, the effective investigation of both the functionality and implications of algorithms and computational processes often requires an in-depth understanding of relatively complex technology and datasets. Compounding this challenge is the reality that conducting such analysis often requires access to proprietary data or technology (Diakopoulos, 2014). While some steps have been taken in developing ways to understand how computational processes shape contemporary media and communication (Eslami et al., 2015; Hamilton, Sandvig, Eslami, & Karahalios, 2014; Sandvig, 2014) there are still significant opportunities for further research.

### *Framing Research*

While I have used framing theory to develop this thesis due to its usefulness in interpreting media power (Gamson and Wolfeld, 1993), there were times when the conceptual limits of framing were reached. These include framing's interpretation of media as discrete and distinct 'locations' and its focus on formal, institutional actors

in shaping frames before presenting them to audiences in a linear and unproblematic way (see *Chapter 3*). In response, the thesis bridged framing theory with assemblage theory to provide a more fruitful conceptual context in which to study media power. It will be helpful, therefore, to revisit current framing scholarship to identify routes for further expansion and development of the field.

First and foremost, one significant development in the field has been the question of whether framing theory still remains relevant in the contemporary media landscape. Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016) assert that the notion of framing should be discarded as a distinct theoretical and operational concept, and instead viewed as “a bridge between paradigms as we shift from an era of mass communication to one of echo chambers, tailored information and microtargeting in the new media environment” (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016: 8). Such a step is supported by Bennett and Iyengar (2008) who argue that “[t]he advent of new media and Web 2.0 technologies, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social networking, is forcing communication scholars to rethink traditional effects models (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).”

This theoretical move echoes and, arguably, validates the similar theoretical step made in this thesis whereby framing theory is ‘bridged’ with assemblage theory. The aim, as detailed in *Chapter 3*, was to enable a more robust analytical approach to contemporary media and communications allowing scholars to adequately take into account the complexities of new media and Web 2.0 technologies, as recognised by Bennett and Iyengar above. The analytical inputs and empirical outputs developed in this thesis may provide a useful starting point for framing researchers seeking to move beyond conventional uses of the concept.

Other recent discussions of framing theory, however, have challenged the ‘retirement’ argument, asserting instead that the “friction” within the framing research community is a sign, not of the theory’s increasing redundancy, but rather as auguring a potent future and renewed opportunities for framing in light of changes in the media environment (Lechler and de Vreese, 2018: 94). At a macro-level, for example, some of the latest discussions seek to re-invent framing using a multi-stage approach which accounts for the stage at which information is organised into frames (frame-building), the point at which these frames are disseminated (frame-distribution) and frames’ reception (frame-setting) (Tewksbury and Matthew Riles, 2018). Such a process is proposed in order to address the impact of digital media and

technology, which it is argued changes the way media stories are constructed. Specifically, while Tewksbury and Matthew Riles assert that the new layer of frame distribution is crucial in any frame analyses owing to the fact that “dissemination and delivery of content online is not neutral” they concede that their argument is “highly speculative” owing to there being no research available to validate their proposed approach (*ibid.*: 138).

It is possible to recognise how Tewksbury and Matthew Riles’ proposed adaption to framing theory presents a degree of alignment with the way framing is bridged with assemblage theory in the analytical model adopted in this thesis. Specifically, both ‘frame-building’ and ‘frame distribution’ can be potentially understood through the notions of choreography and (de)territorialisation, thus enabling framing researchers to account for the actors, factors and dynamics of “frame distribution”. Moreover, the emergent and open-ended qualities of media assemblages could offer further benefits to framing scholars by allowing them to recognise and account for the fluidity inherent in media frames during the ‘frame-building’ process - at least, up to the point of ‘frame setting’ at which point an issue or story arguably becomes coded as a media frame.

In addition to Tewksbury and Matthew Riles’ attempts to reinvent framing theory at a macro, conceptual level Borah (2018) argues for a re-thinking of framing theory in light of the changing media landscape. This, however, largely focuses scholarly attention on the changing nature of media linked with the rise of technology and presents a range of challenges for the use of framing, including where frames can be located in the real-time information flows created by social media platforms (*ibid.*) or whether frames created in digital media are individual or institutional (Qin, 2015). There is also the question of how (methodologically) new media forms, such as hashtags and hyperlinks or tweets or Facebook posts diverge from more conventional news articles (Borah, 2018).

While it is important that framing scholars are considering the implications of digital media platforms for the field, it appears that this exploration is still in relatively early stages of development because it still views social/digital media as distinct and separate entities, rather than as hybridised and networked. It could be argued too that, it is not yet clear to framing scholars how they can make sense of, and re-combine, these new and emerging features of contemporary media with existing theories of framing. Moreover, with the exception of Schuck and Feinholdt (2015), Lecheler,



Bos and Vliegenthar (2015) and Lecheler (2018) who have tentatively started to explore the role of emotions in framing there is little evidence of the role of material factors and qualities being considered in contemporary framing research. In response, it can be argued that the way this thesis adopts framing theory, placing it in the context of hybrid, symbolic-material media assemblages which span individual and institutional scales may offer useful findings that can help scholars reconfigure framing theory at both a conceptual and methodological level.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis set out to investigate how media power has changed in light of the rapid, recent developments of networked digital media platforms and their adoption by a range of formal and informal media actors alike. Central to this research project was the dual aim of devising a revised theoretical perspective on media power *as well as* investigating its validity through empirical analysis of three case studies. In conclusion, the work undertaken throughout the thesis has established and confirmed the significance of a revised theory of contemporary media power, built around the interaction between the culturally and communicatively symbolic components of media communication and the material features and processes through which meaning is established. This chapter summarises its presence in the case studies empirically analysed and articulates directions for further research. It is hoped these will offer media and communication scholars a range of opportunities with which to build on the results of this research and ensure a fertile future for the continued exploration of media power in a digitally-networked environment.

## **Appendix: Ethnography Research Notes**

# NOTEBOOK 2

21/11/12



Mixed students

↳ 200:00

↳ M/F split

↳ Redmond's who

↳ some time

↳ M/Chm students

↳ Bobbin

↳ Pol. Liban mng (3-4?)

↳ Loss of placards

↳ 50:00 will wind up caps

↳ 00:00: xx ←



Left UCLU @ 11am

↳ SWS, NCAFE, DAN

x/y Capite

Mixed students

↳ 200 in

↳ M/F split

↳ Predominantly white

↳ some AME

↳ MICAN students

↳ Boston

↳ (Dr. Lian maby) (3-4?)

↳ Lots of Placements

↳ 50% of white and caps

↳ ← white ←

Left ally

@ / Lam

↳ SHSS, NCAFF, EAM

↳ Capital

~~AA~~

11.18 - 20

↳ <sup>Cap</sup> Lies front + back

↳ Feels contained

→ Cap looking like about to

Make Speed

↓

Speed mode → ? incredible

↳ Mand Start - highly

contained

11.30

↳ Rolling cones / detour

→ Pace busy w/ many

↳ BUT ALSO mand lead

Charming. Dr. ... → Return

17:40

Pras  
telt

→ Shab

seen to be blown

→ Unknown issue

→ New mess again  
2 v. 45

12:00 → Blom

→ Sam  
Samsan  
+ clods

12:20

↳ Mar talk back

+ 1st of line

↳ Abig liney

down to Temple Place

→ The job was mark

↳ Mak M/Stream  
students a man Mura

And along can support

↳ Clear gm of  
with High Bay

13-31

Got to Wmna

bridge

↓ 13.45:00

Rejoined Man

Down to Kennedy Park



Chanting; humid weather

↳ Stations of Suffer / B.S.

vs. Man Mrs, etc

↳ Cadence + contained into Park

② 14:5:00 → Home

ZWT Bremen

D.B.F.

→ Meeting room 2

↳ MD. calling in. Key Adidas team



A.Mc. J.R.C. M.S.

→ subject?

↳ Team 5 ad.

↳ A.A. one

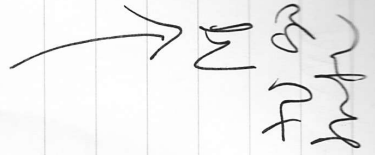
→ Domestic / history of work

↳ best adv. / animal info

↳ T.M. ES adv

↳ U.S. (2012)

→ SPAN



Adidas (WHT)

Dates 21-22 / 11/11

→ SPN can train

↳ want multiten } problem  
↳ simple } 2x10T

- ↳ Full time + only
  - NAT pm
  - NAT high for HA
- @ 2:10 pm

2

11.11

ms follow for end term

↳ goal → but manual upgrade

→ P.I.A → but no fun

↳ Run - not work

→ DASH @ 10.12

↳ 7.12 / m.s. → standard  
↳ m.s. / pm → AMM end

2

→ 10.22

↳ AMM end: MPM →

↳ hands agency terms  
↳ PMM only + standard  
→ NAT for end

Softy:

MR. 2 end

↳ 2.R / m.s. head

think fibre ...

↳ NAT for end to

only all end  
↳ know



16.15

↳ Mon try supply for  
per currency pairs?

↳ Turn down → look at market  
beginning

↳ Who / How?

∩

17.10

↳ Reserve:

- Abroad in for 'currency' pairs

↳ Bank - mod. → capital vs  
of regular pair + poor  
w/ other cur.

↳ Solvents

→ Mod for use in supply  
of 'fund' market

↳ how to cover + what  
expand

∩

18.11

→ Re-growth team

↳ / the org

→ look - out of currency

what 'currency' pairs?

→ No → know's why! / what?

↳ p.o.o

→ Am. team to call Mod  
to fill out?

↳ Am. → update in 20 mins

2

What

↳ what is: how  
↳ what is:

↳ how is: how

↳ T.M. cycle is  
more

↳ me and my BB

↳ how is: how  
↳ how is:

↳ what is: how

↳ how is: how

↳ how is: how  
↳ how is:

↳ how is: how  
↳ how is:

↳ how is: how  
↳ how is:

↳ how is: how  
↳ how is:

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