

The Rise of New Media and its Impact on the EU Referendum Vote

Samuel R. Yates

Abstract

The advancement in technology has generated a shift in how individuals create, consume, and engage with media sources throughout the world. The introduction of new media has also created untold consequences ranging from the relationship with AI¹ to the use of it with the political sphere.² Media coverage of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom is a telling case. The Reuters Institute report indicated that in a sample of 2,378 articles the United Kingdom newspapers focussed on pro-leave sentiments 41% of the time as opposed to the 27% which indicated a pro-remain position.³ Therefore, the relationship between the new media's capabilities, and in turn its influence, demands further elaboration which this article supplies.

Keywords: New media, Globalisation, Brexit, European Union, Ideology, Frankfurt School.

Introduction

This article explores the link between new media and the EU referendum vote. It focuses on the use of targeted social media on key issues such as migration, national sovereignty, and how trading was framed by the media to shape public opinion. In doing so, it considers the ethical implications of social media control by media conglomerates, which has been aided by the impacts of globalisation, convergence and the digitisation of new media. Finally, the article provides political and economic context to the referendum vote to demonstrate the potential impact of social media on voter decision making.

The manipulation of the media by a select few is not a new concept. Max Weber⁴ was acutely aware of the influence that the media may have at the beginning of the era of modernity. The Frankfurt School adopted and developed these early apprehensions

Samuel Yates is a postgraduate student at the University of Chester and a teacher of Sociology and Religious Studies. This article was originally submitted as part of his postgraduate Master of Arts (Religious Studies).

¹ Abdulsadek Hassan, 'The Usage of Artificial Intelligence in New Media', in Abdalmuttaleb M. A. Musleh Al-Sartawi, Anjum Razzaque, and Muhammad Mustafa Kamal (eds), *Artificial Intelligence Systems and the Internet of Things in the Digital Era: Proceedings of EAMMIS 2021* (Cham: Springer, 2021), pp. 229-240.

² Paolo Gerbaudo, Federico Marogna, and Chiara Alzetta, 'When "Positive Posting" Attracts Voters: User Engagement and Emotions in the 2017 UK Election Campaign on Facebook', *Social Media + Society*, vol. 4, no. 5 (2019), pp. 1-11.

³ David Levy, 'UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum', *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* (2016). At: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/uk-press-coverage-eu-referendum>. Accessed 01/06/2023.

⁴ Max Weber, 'Towards a Sociology of the Press', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1976 [1910]), pp. 96-101.

by highlighting the issue of the stylisation of media content.⁵ Through their analysis of the media, culminating in the term “cultural industry” which is characterised by consumerism and capitalism, the media has become an integral part in reproducing a false class consciousness.⁶ More recently, Ben Bagdikian⁷ has challenged the increasingly concentrated landscape of media companies which has created a unilateral representation of news.

Early scholars such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and later Ralph Miliband,⁸ argue that the dominant ruling class utilise the media to “give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”⁹ In doing so, the cultural attitudes represented in the media are presented as reflecting the interest of the masses, when in fact the media is used to legitimise unequal class identities. As the ruling class control the media, they therefore control the ‘mental resources’ of those they rule.¹⁰ From this perspective, social reality is based upon these mental resources and so class-based society operates on ruling class principles and become universally accepted. Consent is manipulated through a process of ideological coercion.¹¹ Stuart Hall et al. build on Marx and Engels’ position, arguing that the coercion that legitimates inequalities develops from more nuanced causes, “hierarchical structures of command” within media outlets, “informal socialisation into institutional roles” and the “sedimenting of dominant ideas into the professional” contribute to the reproduction of the legitimacy of ruling class ideologies.¹²

Steven Lukes argues that the power dynamic is not explicit, physical, or forceful, but coercive practices are embedded over a long period of time. People “accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it.”¹³ Coercive practices are made possible through institutions such as the media and the dominant political ideologies become normalised through the depiction of values, images and opinions.¹⁴ The ideological function of the media is to normalise opinions in order to set limits on the acceptable/ unacceptable. The media is therefore key in legitimising dominant positions as they are able to frame political rhetoric.

⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’, in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (eds), *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works* (Oxford UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 [2001]), pp. 71-101.

⁶ Douglas M. Kellner, ‘Frankfurt School, Media, and the Culture Industry’, *The International Encyclopaedia of Media Studies* (2012). At: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444361506.wbiems029>. Accessed 01/06/2023.

⁷ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); also, Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

⁸ Ralph Miliband, ‘Communications in Capitalist Society’, *Monthly Review*, 1 July (2013). At: <https://monthlyreview.org/2013/07/01/communications-in-capitalist-society/>. Accessed 08/11/2020.

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965).

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan 1978), p. 59.

¹¹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books 2002).

¹² Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 60.

¹³ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2005), p. 28.

¹⁴ David Croteau and William Hoynes, *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing 1997).

Within the EU referendum vote, the *Express* took an ardent pro-Brexit stance, presenting the following as front-page headlines ‘Migrants pay just £100 to invade Britain,’ ‘20,000 migrants ready to sneak into Britain.’¹⁵ In doing so, the *Express* was shaping public perception regarding immigration by using derogatory language which created a negative perception of immigrants. This ties in with public debate regarding racism, multiculturalism, and the welfare state. The old media was utilised effectively to reach key demographic groups with 61% of over 65s voting for Brexit compared to 25% of 18 to 24-year-olds. The pro-Brexit newspapers were able to engage with the over 65s which was evidenced by the 80% of the demographic voting in the decision. The newspapers appeal to the older generation was in part due to a consensus of socially conservative hostility towards Europe.¹⁶ The younger generation are more socially liberal than their predecessors and engage in new media platforms and have more choice online when shaping their own political identities.

Adding to the Frankfurt School’s cultural analysis, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is applicable to both traditional and new forms of media.¹⁷ For Gramsci, the Frankfurt School was too economically deterministic. In their view, the consumers were not passive in their consumption, but rather the association needed to be constantly renegotiated. This process includes a constant “site of struggle” in which consent is the goal. Through consent, the dominant class are able to manipulate and subordinate and if this is not won, ideological struggle ensues.¹⁸ Consent was achieved by the media by creating a ‘them versus us’ mentality regarding the immigration debate. The dehumanising process of migrants presented them as objects and commodities and therefore the public were not empathetic to their situation.¹⁹ In combination with the myth of moral authority, in which the media present the UK public in a position of moral power, the media narrative dehumanises and stigmatises “migrant by deeper entrenching the ‘outsider’ stereotype. They therefore create general feelings of instability and intolerance within the EU.”²⁰

Rather than audiences being passive in their consumption of news, as argued by earlier commentators such as Marx and Engels, the minimalist influence thesis argues that the media do not create new ideas but reinforce existing ones.²¹ Minimalist influence thesis extends to new forms of media as well as the electorates previous

¹⁵ Simon Hinde, ‘Brexit and the Media’, *Hermès, La Revue* vol. 77, no. 1 (2017), pp. 80-86.

¹⁶ Ben Gaskins, Matt Golder, and David Siegel, ‘Religious Participation, Social Conservatism, and Human Development’, *The Journal of Politics* vol. 75, no. 4 (2013), pp. 1125-1141.

¹⁷ Thomas Bates, ‘Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony’ *Journal of The History of Ideas* vol. 36, no. 2 (1975), pp. 351-366.

¹⁸ John Fiske, ‘British Cultural Studies and Television’. In Robert Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (Abingdon: Routledge Publishing 1992), p. 291.

¹⁹ Andreas Musolff, ‘Dehumanizing Metaphors in UK Immigrant Debates in Press and Online Media’, *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* vol 3, no. 1 (2015), pp 41-56.

²⁰ Liudmila Arcimaviciene and Sercan Hamza Baglama, ‘Migration, Metaphor and Myth in Media Representations: The Ideological Dichotomy of “Them” and “Us”.’ *SAGE Open* (2018). At: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244018768657>. Accessed 01/06/2023.

²¹ Joseph Klapper, ‘Mass Communication: Effects’. In David Sillis (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan/ The Free Press 1968), pp. 81–90. See also Jon Miller and Jon Krosnick, ‘News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: A Program of Research on the Priming Hypothesis.’ In Diana Mutz, Paul Sniderman, and Richard Brody (eds), *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 79–100.

political position being reaffirmed when engaging with new forms of media.²² Political “persuasion as consisting of not only attitude change, but also attitude formation and attitude reinforcement,”²³ is significant in that the new media is able to demonstrate power over the electorate. In doing so, political parties are capable of reinforcing, creating and changing individual thought. This was particularly pertinent in the EU referendum vote.²⁴

The decision to leave the European Union was won with a 52% majority.²⁵ The voters main concerns centred around national sovereignty and immigration more so than the potential negative economic affects. This was particularly evidenced by the working and middle classes voting to leave.²⁶ The use of the media, traditional and new, to frame the EU referendum vote is relevant in that by framing key issues in a negative way, Leave campaigners were able to modify public perception. Framing of the three main referendum issues; the NHS, immigration and the increasing migration crisis from Turkey, provided the landscape for the leave campaign. The framing of these issues was the major contributor to achieving success, which was aided by the use of targeted social media campaigns.²⁷ However, once the voting had stopped, the Conservative government had demonstrated failings in the framing of their promises and they were unable to achieve consensus within the British Parliament, resulting in a delay in finalising a deal.²⁸ The media had a significant role in downplaying the positive aspects of EU membership, subsequently leading to less media coverage. Negativity bias within media representation resulted in voters focusing more intently on those aspects compared with positive messages, resulting in stronger negative sentiments to EU membership.²⁹ Andreas Schuck and Claes De Vreese³⁰ argue that risk and opportunity frames were utilised in the EU referendum vote, with the risk frame being more prevalent in relation to the Brexit vote, while De Vreese, Hajo

²² Itai Himelboim, Stephen McCreery, and Marc Smith, ‘Birds of a Feather Tweet Together: Integrating Network and Content Analyses to Examine Cross-Ideology Exposure on Twitter’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* vol. 18, no. 2 (2013), pp. 40–60.

²³ Robert Holbert, Kelly Garrett, and Laurel Gleason, ‘A New Era of Minimal Effects? A Response to Bennett and Iyengar’, *Journal of Communication* vol. 60, no. 1 (2010), p. 17.

²⁴ Neil Gavin, ‘Media Definitely Do Matter: Brexit, Immigration, Climate Change and Beyond’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* vol. 20, no. 4 (2018), pp. 827–845.

²⁵ Sae Wun Chung and Yongmin Kim, *The Truth behind the Brexit Vote: Clearing away Illusion after Two Years of Confusion* (Seoul: Konkuk University, 2019).

²⁶ Chung and Kim, *The Truth behind the Brexit Vote*.

²⁷ Genevieve Gorrell, Ian Roberts, Mark A. Greenwood, Mehmet E. Bakir, Benedetta Iavarone, Kalina Bontcheva, *Quantifying Media Influence and Partisan Attention on Twitter during the UK EU Referendum*. (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, n.d).

²⁸ Matthew Goodwin, Simon Hix, and Mark Pickup, ‘For and Against Brexit: A Survey Experiment of Campaign Effects on Public Attitudes Toward EU Membership’, *British Journal of Political Science* vol. 50, no. 2 (2020), pp. 481–495.

²⁹ Stuart Soroka, *Negativity in Democratic Politics: Causes and Consequence*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014); and Aaron Abbarno and Galina Zapryanova, ‘Indirect Effects of Eurosceptic Messages on Citizen Attitudes Toward Domestic Politics’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* vol. 51, no. 4 (2013), pp. 581–597.

³⁰ Andreas Schuck and Claes De Vreese, ‘Between Risk and Opportunity: News Framing and Its Effects on Public Support for EU Enlargement’, *European Journal of Communication* vol. 21, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5–32; and Andreas Schuck and Claes De Vreese, ‘Public Support for Referendums: The Role of the Media’, *West European Politics* vol. 34, no. 2 (2011), pp. 181–207.

Boomgaarden and Holli Semtko³¹ utilize research conducted on Turkey's EU membership, agreeing with Matthew Goodwin, Simon Hicks and Mark Pickup that negative framing of EU enlargement created "stronger effects than positive frames ... providing some evidence that attitudes can be shaped by the framing of the issue in interaction with individual characteristics."³² A similar explanation can therefore be used when analysing framing techniques used by the British media.

The rise of the new media has enabled the dominant class to continue to create and construct cultural ideals. Hall et al utilise Althusser's ideological state apparatus³³ to argue that consumers are passive. However, there is a state of ideological struggle between the primary and secondary definers. Primary definers refer to individuals, formal and non-formal, who are able to construct, and define, media representations. Primary definers may be placed in positions of formality, and may include politicians, or may be informal individuals who are able to galvanise organised participation.³⁴ Media organisations align themselves with concentrated views in line with political incentives. Primary definers are entrenched in the creation of a social reality built upon "reference points to which all further news coverage and political action must be seen to respond."³⁵ Challenges to primary definers solidify the transaction between journalist and politician which is built upon political and economic benefit. The relationship between media organisations and politicians is exacerbated further due to political hierarchical incentive structures which enhance "knowledge, status, and power."³⁶ The minimalist influence thesis does not have the ability to change individuals' attitudes, but decisions are made through "politicians' perceptions."³⁷ These perceptions or misperceptions are created through the fear that negative media coverage will stunt a political career. Jonathan Cohen, Yariv Tsfati and Tamir Sheafer argue that the perception of politicians towards the influence of media coverage creates a symbiotic relationship, whereby both parties' interests create a status quo.³⁸ This becomes

³¹ Claes De Vreese, Hajo Boomgaarden, and Holli Semetko, 'Direct Framing Effects: The Effects of News Media Framing on Public Support for Turkish Membership in the European Union', *Communication Research*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2011), pp. 179–205.

³² Goodwin, Hix, and Pickup, 'For and Against Brexit', p. 5.

³³ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso Books 1970).

³⁴ Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick, 'A Primary Definer Online: The Construction and Propagation of a Think Tank's Authority on Social Media', *Media, Culture & Society* vol. 40, no. 2 (2017), pp. 246–266; and Robert Entman, 'Media Framing Biases and Political Power: Explaining Slant in News of Campaign 2008', *Journalism* vol. 11, no. 4 (2010), pp. 389–408.

³⁵ Anstead and Chadwick, 'A Primary Definer Online', p. 250.

³⁶ Anstead and Chadwick, 'A Primary Definer Online', p. 250.

³⁷ Gavin, 'Media Definitely Do Matter', p. 837.

³⁸ Jonathon Cohen, Yariv Tsfati, and Tamir Sheafer, 'The Influence of Presumed Media Influence in Politics: Do Politicians' Perceptions of Media Power Matter?' *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 72, no. 2 (2008), pp. 331–344.

problematic as politicians fear negative media coverage and therefore the media indirectly initiate political agenda setting.³⁹

This article combines work from the Frankfurt school with more contemporary thinkers such as Hall⁴⁰ and Bagdikian to analyse the uses of new media. Herbert Marcuse,⁴¹ a key proponent within the Frankfurt School, argued that the media creates an unavoidable link between consumer and producer. The result of this connection promotes a unilateral relationship and “a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour” emerges.⁴² The consumer adopts the cultural, economic, political and social order contrived by the dominant stratum. The market model can be applied to the EU referendum vote with those who were politically engaged - often upper classes - were more likely to vote to remain in the EU.⁴³ Whilst those who would benefit the least in the short term voted to leave, the use of new media was integral to re-frame EU membership. The debate shifted public perception on immigration and national sovereignty to divert attention from impending unequal economic distribution.⁴⁴ A key proponent to the argument McChesney⁴⁵ has contributed by emphasising the influence of insufficient media coverage on culture, public opinion and society. McChesney develops this further arguing that concentrated media ownership has negated political and civil engagement for the individual resulting in an anti-democratic media system, particularly within an American context, but this can be applied to Britain.⁴⁶ This has been the case in traditional media outlets, print newspapers, television and the radio. However, the rise of new media, as a result of technological advancement and globalisation, has exacerbated the sway that dominant neo-liberal

³⁹ Gunther Lengauer, Patrick Donges, and Fritz Plasser, ‘Media Power in Politics’. In B. Pfetsch (ed.), *Political Communication Cultures in Western Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), pp.171-195; Peter Maurer and Florian Arendt, ‘A Blessing or a Double-Edged Sword? Politicians’ Perceptions of Newspapers’ Impact on the Functioning of Democracy’, *Communications* vol. 41, no. 1 (2016), pp. 1–20; Peter Van Aelst, Kees Brants, and Phillip Van Praag, ‘The Fourth Estate as Superpower? An Empirical Study of Perceptions of Media Power in Belgium and the Netherlands’, *Journalism Studies* vol. 9 no. 4 (2008) pp. 494–511.

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘Class and the Mass Media. In Richard Mabey (ed.), *Class: A Symposium* (London: Blond 1966), pp. 93-114. See also Stuart Hall, ‘Culture, the Media, and the “Ideological Effect’’. In James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp. 315–48.

⁴¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press 1964).

⁴² Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution & Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press 1972), p. 12.

⁴³ Chung and Kim, *The Truth behind the Brexit Vote*.

⁴⁴ Luke Telford and Jonathon Wistow, ‘Brexit and the Working Class on Teesside: Moving Beyond Reductionism’, *Capital & Class*, vol. 44, no 4 (2020), pp. 553–572.

⁴⁵ Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics In Dubious Times* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press 1999); and Robert McChesney *The Problem of The Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press 2004).

⁴⁶ McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. Steven Barnett, ‘What’s Wrong With Media Monopolies? A Lesson From History and A New approach to Media Ownership Policy’, *MEDIA@LSE Electronic Working Papers* (London: Media@LSE, 2010); Stephen Holmes, ‘Liberal Constraints On Private Power? Reflections On the Origins and Rationale Of Access Regulation’. In Judith Lichtenberg (ed.), *Democracy and the Mass Media* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), pp. 21-65.

ideologies have had.⁴⁷ This article aims to situate the arguments of the Frankfurt School and wider Marxian critique within a contemporary context by examining the influence of new media outlets on the EU referendum vote; specifically, examining the ways in which social media is, and has been, utilised by members of a political elite.

The control of ideologies is only made possible due to the control of media ownership. The vertical integration of media companies provides an illusionary veil against the democratisation of media ownership.⁴⁸ The conglomerates of cross-media ownership have ensured that the concentration of ownership to remain in the hands of a few.⁴⁹ Globalisation, digitisation and convergence have exacerbated the influence of new media. The amalgamation of these factors has meant that the ideologies are not confined to those who actively engage with traditional forms of news, but to all.⁵⁰ Benjamin Compaine and Douglas Gomery⁵¹ are sceptical of the concentrated ownership argument, arguing that the media conglomeration is becoming more diverse and further arguing that 'the media monopoly is a myth.'⁵² The accessibility, as a result of the aforementioned factors, has meant that individuals across the world are able to actively choose which information they consume.⁵³ The pluralistic nature of new media may seem to be a step towards the democratisation of information, alongside citizen journalism, but Baker would disagree on the basis on vertical integration.⁵⁴

One of the issues that inhibits the democratic dissemination of news is the adoption of a market model. Corporate media outlets are based upon an economic structure that is geared towards profit maximisation rather than non-partisan presentation.⁵⁵ Whilst operating on this model, corporations are accountable to a number of share-holders, advertisers and the public who all have their own individual expectations. As a result of this indebtedness, companies are required to construct media content based on news values that are palatable to the widest of audiences and meet the needs of ownership, which may be economically, politically or ideologically motivated.⁵⁶ As a result of the orientation towards profit maximisation, media corporations produce ideologically stagnant messages geared towards neo-liberal and free market capitalism. For Christman⁵⁷ this has a dual effect on moral autonomy. Christman identifies two aspects of moral autonomy. Autonomy can be characterised by the identification of the individuals authentic self, in combination of extrinsic and individual freedom. Secondary to moral autonomy is the ability to reflect and readjust

⁴⁷ Sean Phelan, *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴⁸ Edwin Baker, *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2007).

⁴⁹ Matthew McAllister and Jennifer Proffitt, 'Media Ownership In A Corporate Age.' In Lee Wilkins and Clifford Christians (ed.), *The Handbook Of Mass Media Ethics* (London: Routledge 2009).

⁵⁰ McAllister and Proffitt, 'Media Ownership in a Corporate Age'.

⁵¹ Benjamin Compaine and Douglas Gomery, *Who Owns The Media? Competition and Concentration In The Mass Media Industry* (New Jersey: Erlbaum 2000).

⁵² McAllister and Proffitt, 'Media Ownership in a Corporate Age,' p. 329.

⁵³ Compaine and Gomery, *Who Owns The Media?*

⁵⁴ Baker, *Media Concentration and Democracy*.

⁵⁵ David Croteau and William Hoynes, *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and The Public Interest* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, 2006).

⁵⁶ Johan Gatlung and Mari Ruge, 'The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation Of The Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises In Four Norwegian Newspapers', *Journal of International Peace Research*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1965) pp. 64-91.

⁵⁷ John Christman, *Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy* (Stanford University: Metaphysics Research Lab, 2003).

values, having a contrived distribution of media negates a moral autonomy which creates an ideological proclivity towards passivity. The issue of conglomeration of media is that it encourages profit maximisation at the expense of ethical considerations. Ramsey⁵⁸ offers an alternative by suggesting policy changes that attenuate the erosion of individual autonomy. These changes include creating commercial broadcasters that are untethered of trustee influence, lobbying the Federal Communication Commission to enforce ownership rules. By considering the ethical implications of concentrated ownership, policy makers and the initiatives they create may contribute to more democratically aligned presentation of media content.

The British media coverage of the EU referendum vote provides an example of how concentrated media ownership produces undemocratic representation of information. The Sun and The Times, both owned by News Corp UK published pro-leave articles.⁵⁹ The British newspapers provided a pedestal for leave campaign's sentiments and subsequently had direct influence on the public perception (Mandelson, 2016).⁶⁰ Levy, Aslan and Bironzo,⁶¹ found that The Sun had one of the highest levels of reach which contributed to 48% of articles presenting pro-leave partisanship. This demonstrates how the political alignment of ownership is reflected in the platforms they own. Keaveney⁶² argues 'Press releases cannot win or lose an election. What they can do however is increase or shape media coverage and therefore public perceptions.' This is reaffirmed with the disproportionately weighted media coverage supporting pro-leave sentiments.

The virality of social media therefore plays an integral role in the political communication, and information is disseminated throughout society in an accessible and engaging manner.⁶³ Tandoc, Lim and Ling⁶⁴ argue that with dissemination of views comes 'fake news' which is characterised by 'fabrication, deception, manipulation, and propaganda.'⁶⁵ Fake news is made possible due to the virality of political information. Viral news can be defined as the spread of information that is socially significant, through the platform of social media.⁶⁶ There are several ethical

⁵⁸ Phil Ramsey 'Broadcasting to reflect "life and culture as we know it": Media policy, devolution and the case of Northern Ireland,' *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 37, no. 8 (2015), pp. 1193–1209.

⁵⁹ David Levy, Billur Aslan, and Diego Bironzo, *UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum Vote* (Oxford: University of Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2016).

⁶⁰ Peter Mandelson, 'How the Struggle for Europe was Lost', *Financial Times*, 2 July (2016). At: <https://www.ft.com/content/98619e5c-3f70-11e6-8716-a4a71e8140b0>. Accessed 31/07/2023.

⁶¹ Levy, Aslan, and Bironzo, 'UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum Vote.'

⁶² Paula Keaveney, 'Party Leadership Elections in the UK', *Political Insight*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2019), pp. 17–19.

⁶³ Divina Frau-Meigs, 'Developing a Critical Mind Against Fake News', *The UNESCO Courier* (2017). At: <https://en.unesco.org/courier/july-september-2017/developing-critical-mind-against-fake-news>. Accessed 31/07/2023.

⁶⁴ Edson Tandoc, Darren Lim, and Rich Ling, 'Defining "Fake News"', *Digital Journalism*, vol. 6, no 2 (2018), pp. 137–153.

⁶⁵ Ulrike Reisach, 'The Responsibility of Social Media in Times of Societal and Political Manipulation', *European Journal of Operational Research* (2020). At: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0377221720308249>; Nathaniel Persily 'The 2016 US election: Can Democracy Survive the Internet?', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2017), pp. 63–76.

⁶⁶ Ahmed Al-Rawi 'Viral News on Social Media', *Digital Journalism*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019), pp. 63–79.

issues regarding the accountability and responsibility of social media platforms and their role in the spreading information, or misinformation.⁶⁷ Barbie Zelizer⁶⁸ argues that due to globalisation and the changing nature of new media, the responsibility cannot solely lay with media corporations but with the individuals who consume it. Those that engage with social media have their own responsibility, and individuals may use these platforms to spread fake news, misinformation or their own political opinions which may go unregulated. If information is deemed as breaking company ethical guidelines posts, tweets or comments can stay online if considered newsworthy.⁶⁹ This becomes problematic as newsworthiness is defined by other social media users and this allows the spread of information without the regulation required from media platforms.⁷⁰

Both journalists and individuals agree with the Hutchinson Commission⁷¹ which states that journalists have an ethical duty to ensure a democratic presentation of news which provides 'comprehensive, accurate accounts of the news.'⁷² However, due to economic and political pressures this is not always feasible and presenting news which is accessible and interesting to the audience is required, which prevents accuracy.⁷³ The introduction of the new media platforms further exacerbates the economic pressures felt by journalist as a result of the aforementioned market model, digitisation of new media introduces global competitiveness.⁷⁴ Hugh Martin and Lawrence Souder advocate for a shift from the market model based solely upon competition towards competition base upon inter-dependence between audience, journalist and advertisers. The fundamental ethics that inform the model include 'transparency, self-restraint, adherence to professional norms, and the treatment of others as ends instead of means.'⁷⁵ Martin and Souder conclude that journalist must employ guidelines which places the democratic media process at the forefront to serve

⁶⁷ Denis McQuail, *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003).

⁶⁸ Barbie Zelizer, 'Journalism, Memory, and The Voice of the Visual.' In Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010) pp. 1–27.

⁶⁹ Mike Isaak and Sheera Frenkel, 'Facebook adds labels for some Posts as Advertisers Pull Back', *New York Times* (2020). At: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/technology/facebook-labels-advertisers.html>. Accessed 31/07/2023.

⁷⁰ Reisach, 'The Responsibility of social media.'

⁷¹ Stephen Bates, 'A Free and Responsible University: The Hutchins Commission, the Press, and Academia,' *Journalism History* vol. 47, no. 2 (2021), pp. 117-134.

⁷² Hugh Martin and Lawrence Souder, 'Interdependence in Media Economics: Ethical Implications of the Economic Characteristics of News', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* vol. 24, nos 2-3 (2009), p. 128.

⁷³ Randal Beam, 'How Perceived Environmental Uncertainty Influences the Marketing Orientation of U.S. Daily Newspapers', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 2 (1996), pp. 285–303; Randal Beam 'Content Differences Between Daily Newspapers with Strong and Weak Market Orientations', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 2 (2003), pp. 368–390; Peter Gade, 'Newspapers and Organizational Development: Management and Journalist Perceptions of Newsroom Cultural Change', *Journalism & Communication Monographs* vol. 6, no. 1 (2004), pp. 3-55.

⁷⁴ Johannes Ludwig, 'The Essential Economic Problem of the Media: Working Between Market Failure and Cross-Financing', *The Journal of Media Economics*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2000), pp.187–200.

⁷⁵ Alfred Schmid, *Property, Power and Public Choice* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

the majority's interests.⁷⁶ To achieve this, media platforms must ensure ethical journalism is predicated on economic, social and political fairness and not simply increased profit expansion.

The rise of new media has been unprecedented since the early 2000's with technological advancement, globalisation and the digitisation of the media which has transformed production, distribution and consumption.⁷⁷ This, combined with a rise in populist political movements has meant that social media has become an integral tool within political spheres.⁷⁸ The Reuters Institute Digital News Report⁷⁹ found that the 35% of the UK public use social media. Ofcom's⁸⁰ subsequent report found that 43% of those engaged with political news through social media platforms. As result of increased new media usage, individuals around the world have seen an increase in political activity/activism. The globalisation and digitisation that social media platforms utilise enable individuals to collaborate, exchange and engage with socio-economic factors.⁸¹ Cho et al⁸² apply the Orientation-Stimuli-Reasoning-Orientation-Response model which emphasises and examines the ways in which new media platforms connect individuals. The model emphasises news curation arguing that new media plays a mediating process between politicians, journalists and individuals. As individuals are consistently using new forms of media, political and economic information is curated for a desired effect, this may be ideological reinforcement, voter change or political interests.⁸³ The struggle between the gatekeepers of the media and the individual is a result of the news values that are included in the presentation of the media. The news is integral in constructing a hyper reality in which the importance, immediacy and seriousness of events are manipulated to establish control.⁸⁴ The creation of a hyper-reality is significant in the sense of manufacturing a perception of

⁷⁶ Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷⁷ Bulent Tarman and Mehmet Yigit, 'The Impact of Social Media on Globalization, Democratization and Participative Citizenship', *Journal of Social Science Education*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2013), pp. 75-80.

⁷⁸ John Postill, 'Populism and Social Media: A Global Perspective,' *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2018), pp. 754–765.

⁷⁹ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2016).

⁸⁰ Ofcom, *News Consumption In The UK: Research Report* (London: Ofcom, 2017).

⁸¹ Hsuan-Ting Chen, Michael Chan, and Francis Lee, 'Social Media Use and Democratic Engagement: A Comparative Study of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China', *Chinese Journal of Communication*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2016), pp. 348–366; Francis Lee and Michael Chan, *Media and Protest Logics in the Digital Era: Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Brian Loader and Dan Mercea, 'Networking Democracy? Social Media Innovations and Participatory Politics', *Information, Communication & Society* vol. 14, no. 6 (2011), pp. 757–769.

⁸² Jaecho Cho, Dhavan Shah, Jack McLeod, Douglas McLeod, Rosanne Scholl, and Mellisa Gotlieb, 'Campaigns, Reflection, and Deliberation: Advancing an OSROR Model of Communication Effects', *Communication Theory*, vol. 19, issue 1 (2009), pp. 66–88.

⁸³ Michael Chan, Hsuan-Ting Chen and Francis Lee, 'Examining the Roles of Mobile and Social Media in Political Participation: A Cross-National Analysis of Three Asian Societies Using a Communication Mediation Approach', *New Media & Society*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2017).

⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Hyper-Realism of Simulation'. In Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory: 1900-2000* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell 2000); Theo Araujo and Toni Van Der Meer, 'News Values on Social Media: Exploring What Drives Peaks in User Activity about Organizations on Twitter', *Journalism*, vol. 21, no. 5 (2020), pp. 633–651.

events which in turn manufacture consent, passivity and adherence. The introduction of new media has allowed for citizen journalism whereby individuals are relatively free to express their opinion.⁸⁵ Individuals are now free to choose as a result of the pluralism of media outlets and they are able to democratically choose where to consume their information which aligns with their political standing.⁸⁶ In doing so, the framing of information is reinforced as a result of the market model aforementioned. Citizen Journalism was apparent within the run up to the EU referendum vote. Mortensen⁸⁷ argues that instead of representing opinions that are informed, individuals would rather use social media to display a desired political perception, based upon personal experience which negates a moral duty. The moral duty is based on citizenship which is informed by an individual's civic responsibility,⁸⁸ in the case of the EU referendum vote, an individual's civic duty is situated in presenting unbiased, informed opinions.⁸⁹

A succinct overview of the impact of new media on political communication is provided by Asimina Michailidou:⁹⁰

Digital media have ushered in a new era in crisis communication by restraining the control of traditional journalistic media and political leaderships over information flows on the one hand, and strengthening the informational and participatory independence of the public, on the other.

The rise of the new media has paved way for politicians to engage with people at a global level⁹¹ and in more accessible ways; they are able to communicate with new media users without having to leave their office. As Max Hanska-Ahy and Stefan Bauchowitz⁹² suggest, 'It is also clear the mediated relationship between politicians, citizens, and journalists, how these groups communicate, engage with and relate to each other, has changed'. The ways in which individuals receive their media has changed and therefore changed the ways in which they perceive the events. Their perception is formulated through a hyper reality which has been constructed, manipulated and changed.⁹³ In relation to the new media Hanska-Ahy and Bauchowitz found that the

⁸⁵ Melissa Wall, *Citizen Journalism Practices, Propaganda, Pedagogy* (London: Routledge Focus, 2019).

⁸⁶ Peggy Valcke, 'A Global Perspective on Media Pluralism and Diversity: Introduction.' In Peggy Valcke, Miklos Sukos, and Robert Picard (eds), *Media Pluralism and Diversity Concepts, Risks and Global Trends* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), pp. 1-19.

⁸⁷ Metta Mortensen, 'When Citizen Photojournalism Sets the News Agenda: Neda Agha Soltan as a Web 2.0 Icon of Post-Election Unrest in Iran', *Global Media and Communication*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2011), pp. 4-16.

⁸⁸ Tim Highfield, *Social Media and Everyday Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

⁸⁹ Catherine Bouko, July De Wilde, Sofie DeCock, Orphee De Clerq, Valentina Manchia, and David Garcia, 'Reactions to Brexit in Images: A Multimodal Content Analysis of Shared Visual Content on Flickr', *Visual Communication*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 1-30.

⁹⁰ Asimina Michailidou, 'Twitter, Public Engagement and the Eurocrisis: More than an Echo Chamber?' In Mauro Barisione and Asimina Michailidou (eds), *Social Media and European Politics. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁹¹ Shakuntala Rao, 'Glocal Ethics'. In Robert Fortner and Mark Fackler (eds), *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 154-171.

⁹² Max Hänska-Ahy and Stefan Bauchowitz, 'Tweeting For Brexit: How Social Media Influenced the Referendum'. In John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Richard Snoddy, and Rodney Tait (eds), *Brexit, Trump and the Media* (Bury St Edmunds: Abrams Academic Publishing, 2017), p. 27.

⁹³ Jean Baudrillard and Sheila Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

twitter activity of Eurosceptic/ leave voters was higher than remainers. Eurosceptics were more active in their tweeting but also in their consumption of media content. Furthermore, Hanska-Ahy and Bauchowitz analysed homophily on Twitter finding that leave supporters were more inclined to engage with those who shared their opinions rather engaging with open minded dialogue. This indicates that key points of contestation, such as migration and multiculturalism, were not debated but reinforced in an echo-chamber. For example, 46% of remain supporters engaged with dialogue, that is replying, retweeting and quoting with fellow remainers compared with 86% of leave voters. This demonstrates that remain supporters were more open to varied conversations regarding key points in the EU referendum. The key for the dissemination of dialogue, media content and views was the accessibility of new media. Social media is able to facilitate dialogue which previously was not possible. In doing so, individuals are able to formulate new ideas, reinforce existing ones and change one another's.⁹⁴ Leave sentiments were also more effective on social media platform such as Twitter. Tweet restrictions were conducive for leave slogans such as 'take control', 'vote leave' and 'Brexit', these messages are digestible and accessible to a fast-paced media platform.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Leave campaigners were more effective in utilising new media platforms to generate support and sustain momentum leading up to the debate. The use of social media was used in combination of Cambridge Analytica to target voters using AI. By targeting voters, the leave campaign was able to reinforce existing voters and identify previous non-voters which was significant to gain a majority vote.⁹⁶

This article has provided an overview of the EU referendum vote and the influence of the media on its outcomes. By discussing key issues of media ownership, ideological framing and the ethics of journalism, the essay has situated the decision within a media focus. By utilising a Marxian critique of the role of the media, the essay has situated the EU referendum decision by highlighting the downfalls of concentrated media ownership. It is important to acknowledge the nuanced ways in which the media has influence. Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley's⁹⁷ analysis of voter motivations demonstrates the reasons behind voter decision, which places media influence highly. The ability of political parties to handle economic affairs, national sovereignty and immigration are all key factors. The affects that the media have, direct or indirect, are consequential. Old and new forms of media play an integral role in manufacturing consent) and ideological manipulation, which in turn affects the democratisation of information.

⁹⁴ Deni Elliot and Amanda Decker, 'New Media and an Old Problem Promoting Democracy'. In Robert Fortner and Mark Fackler (eds), *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 234- 247.

⁹⁵ Hanska-Ahy and Bauchowitz, 'Tweeting for Brexit.'

⁹⁶ David Pegg, Rob Evans and Paul Lewis, 'Revealed: Dominic Cummings firm paid Vote Leave's AI firm £260,000', *The Guardian*, 12 July (2020). At: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jul/12/revealed-dominic-cummings-firm-paid-vote-leaves-ai-firm-260000>. Accessed 31/07/2023.

⁹⁷ Harold Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).