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Barnard, S.; Boukes, M.

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The Oliver Twist: Why young adults watch *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*

Saga Barnard^a and Mark Boukes ^b

^aGraduate School of Communication, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands;

^bDepartment of Communication Science, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Motivations matter because they affect cognitive processes, which in turn impact any effects that satire might have upon viewers. Therefore, a better understanding of motivations add nuance to future research and generates suggestions on how to create engaging news narratives for a twenty-first century audience. This paper investigates why young adults watch the popular journalistic satire show *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. Through semi-structured interviews with young adults ($N = 11$), using theoretical thematic analysis, a framework of 11 motivations for consuming satire was constructed. The results of this study carry four implications: (1) entertainment and information are interdependent, (2) information is made up of learning and understanding, (3) two new motivations were discovered: inspiration and host, and (4) young adults desire authenticity.

KEYWORDS

Interview; John Oliver; journalistic satire; *Last Week Tonight*; motivations; political satire; young adults

Traditional news struggles to reach the younger generations, who instead get their news via non-traditional media (Galan et al., 2019). They are more likely to learn about politics from political satire (Research Center, 2008) and to consume it (Hmielowski et al., 2011; Young & Tisinger, 2006) than older generations, but even the general audience are also turning toward, or supplementing, news with lighter alternatives (Boukes, 2019). This demonstrates the shortcomings of traditional news instead of a general disinterest (Buckingham, 1997; Costera Meijer, 2007; Galan et al., 2019; Graber, 2001). Technological advances have enabled us to remain constantly tuned into current affairs and provide us with a greater choice of media than ever before. In the past, with fewer media competitors, traditional news did not have to compete for audience attention (Prior, 2005). However, in the increasingly competitive market of the twenty-first century, traditional news has arguably failed to capitalize on entertainment, which has emerged as a strong market currency (Thussu, 2008). Most traditional news brands are still not associated with being useful, interesting or fun (Galan et al., 2019), even though

traditional news have been adapted by following media logic (Boukes, 2019), using multiplatform approaches and social media to become more competitive (Galan et al., 2019; Negreira-Rey et al., 2022). To reinvigorate a dying genre central to a well-functioning democratic society, we should study programs that successfully grab the attention of younger audiences. While Mindich (2005) investigated why young adults tune out from traditional news, this paper asks: why do they tune in to satire?

Political satire can be considered the reinvention of political journalism (Baym, 2005) as a response to new demands in the news market (Ödmark & Nicolai, 2024); a reinvention which, despite criticism, is not necessarily less substantive than its traditional counterpart (Fox et al., 2007). Otto et al. (2017) created an infotainment typology by placing programs on a two-dimensional scale:

- Are topics primarily or secondarily political?
- Are political messages implicit or explicit?

This paper will concern itself with political satire: implicit messages on primarily political topics (Holbert, 2005). Whereas multiple effect studies have explored how political satire affects *political knowledge* (Becker & Bode, 2018; Feldman, 2013; Young & Hoffman, 2012), *understanding* (Brewer & McKnight, 2017), *attitudes and opinion formation* (Baumgartner, 2013; Burgers & Brugman, 2022; LaMarre & Walther, 2013), *political discussion* (Jeong et al., 2023; Young & Esralew, 2011), *trust and efficiency* (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Peifer & Myrick, 2021), *engagement* (Hoffman & Young, 2011; Lee & Kwak, 2014), and more (Becker, 2020), consistent effects have been difficult to establish.

Motivations affect cognition, in that it affects how much mental effort is used when processing messages (Feldman, 2013). It therefore stands to reason that audience consumption motivations will impact the effect of consuming political satire. Establishing a catalog of motivations including indicators to use as a framework, could add nuance to future effect studies by controlling results for motivations (Young, 2013). Despite the growing number of satire-focused studies, there has been little qualitative inquiry as to why audiences watch these programs. Uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973) argues that audiences are aware of, and able to justify why they consume certain media as consumption is driven by the desire to satisfy needs. It is grounded in the idea of self-aware audiences who can motivate their media choices, with such motivations split into two types of gratifications: hedonic/pleasure-seeking, or eudaimonic/truth-seeking (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Understanding the motivations of media consumption is particularly important in the current high choice media environment, where most individual preferences can be satisfied (Prior, 2005). Since qualitative research concerns itself with understanding, not explaining,

a qualitative approach could uncover and expand on motivations that drive political satire consumption. It is therefore strange that little research has simply *asked* viewers to explain the appeal.

A theoretical framework

Young (2013) did ask young adults this question; however, it was through an open-ended survey, providing little chance for respondents to expand on their response and for the researchers to probe for elaboration. The seven motivations established by Young (2013) nevertheless provide a good initial theoretical framework. To further expand it, we also find potential motivations for political satire consumption by combining it with motivations identified for consuming the original components of this hybrid genre – political (McLeod & Becker, 1974) and entertainment (Bartsch & Viehoff, 2010) media. McLeod and Becker (1974) identified five motivations of political media consumption, while Bartsch and Viehoff (2010, p. 2252) identified seven motivations of entertainment media consumption.

Table 1 accounts for the suggested overlap and divergences of the motivations identified by Young (2013), McLeod and Becker (1974) and Bartsch and Viehoff (2010) to establish an integrated theoretical framework of nine potential motivators for consuming political satire.

Last Week Tonight

Even when narrowing down infotainment as political satire (Holbert, 2005), there is still a lot of variation within the genre. During this era of repoliticisation of humor (Nieuwenhuis & Zijp, 2022) certain satirists

Table 1. Integrated Theoretical Framework for Political Satire Consumption.

| Motivations | Political satire, Young (2013) | Political media, McLeod and Becker (1974) | Entertainment media, Bartsch and Viehoff (2010) | Type |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|---------------------|
| Entertainment | Funny, Entertaining | Excitement | Fun, Thrill | Hedonic |
| Information | Learning the news | Surveillance | – | Eudaimonic |
| Context | Context, Comprehension | Voter guidance, Surveillance | – | Eudaimonic |
| Unbiased | Unbiased, Truthful | – | Thought-provoking experiences | Eudaimonic |
| Specific perspective | Liberal, Truthful | Reinforcement | – | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Enhance news consumption | Makes news more interesting/fun | – | – | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Enhance social interactions | – | Anticipated communications | Social sharing of emotions | Eudaimonic |
| Relatable content | – | – | Being moved, Social sharing of emotions, Vicarious experience | Eudaimonic |
| Emotional release | – | – | Acting out emotions, Being moved | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |

have veered into journalistic satire; a subgenre where the host and writers of satire shows embrace some traditional values of journalism like factuality, political relevance, and holding the powerful accountable (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020). To make this research as relevant for traditional news to incorporate as possible, we focus our research on journalistic satire due to its overlap with traditional roles of journalism (Ödmark & Nicolai, 2024). More specifically, the program: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (LWT), serving as a representative of the subgenre, as the show is characterized by journalists working together with comedians, using journalistic techniques, to pursue journalistic goals (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020).

While exact viewership of LWT is difficult to establish as HBO does not publish ratings, it is safe to say that LWT is a popular show with 10 seasons to its name and 28 Primetime Emmy Awards since it began airing in 2014. LWT has a multiplatform approach and publishes large segments of the show for free on its YouTube channel. To date, the channel has about 9 million subscribers with its most viewed video (Televangelists) at 41 million views, significantly outperforming other popular satirical show channels, such as The Daily Show (TDS), Late Night with Seth Meyers (LNSM), and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert (LSSC). The strategy to approach audiences through a global and free social media platform enables the show to reach global mainstream audiences (Brockes, 2018), especially internet-native young adults. LWT is also a proven mobilizer (Davisson & Donovan, 2019). For example, during an episode on net neutrality (which aired 01/06/2014), Oliver encouraged viewers to express their opinions on the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) website, causing the website to crash (Research Center, 2014), and a few years later crashing it in a similar fashion once again (Meier & Berg, 2024).

Considering satire more generally, Fox et al. (2007) found that satire and traditional news differ more in presentation than in substance. It is therefore worth reviewing the format of how LWT presents information compared to traditional news and other US-based satire shows to identify its competitive edge. Each episode of LWT is 30 min and streams weekly on HBO. There are two major segments of the show: "A Quick Recap" briefly covers some prominent news stories of the week, and the "Main Story Tonight" is a longer segment dedicated to a single topic. Here, Oliver breaks down the story with analysis and evidence, which is sometimes followed up with an interview or satirical sketch (Becker & Bode, 2018).

A Quick Recap echoes the opening monologues of TDS, LNSM and LSSC, providing an overview of headline news with rapid-fire jokes and only brief analysis. These opening monologues are when journalistic satire shows most resemble traditional news formats, the difference being humor (Fox et al., 2007). Unlike TDS, LNSM and LSSC, LWT airs only once, and later, in the

week, enabling them to offer a different recap than others as they know which news of the cycle became salient, and therefore cover neglected topics.

In a similar vein, *The Main Story Tonight* is dedicated to a political issue the show deems in need of more media attention (Becker & Bode, 2018; Brewer & McKnight, 2017). This segment not only breaks with the formats of other US shows but allows Oliver to dig deep into one neglected subject akin to investigative reporting (Davisson & Donovan, 2019), rather than simply humorously commenting on reiterated news headlines – exemplifying the journalistic satire genre. He often encourages viewers to act (Brodie, 2019; Davisson & Donovan, 2019; Meier & Berg, 2024; Michaud Wild, 2019) through online activism, by donating money or engaging political representatives, demonstrating what Waisanen (2018) styled advocacy satire. We refer to these features as calls-to-action. If a guest is present, they are used to highlight the issue in focus, not to divide attention by plugging a product, show or movie as we see in TDS, LSSC and LSSC. Instead, they are often part of the big stunt that the *Main Story Tonight* occasionally ends with. These stunts have become a characteristic of the show (Davisson & Donovan, 2019) and align with Oliver’s comedy style (Brodie, 2019) of trolling the system (Davisson & Donovan, 2019).

LWT has a large budget at HBO, making big stunts like creating a dog supreme court, possible. As an on-demand streaming show, LWT is uninterrupted by commercial breaks (Becker & Bode, 2018), meaning less advertisers to influence the content of the show (McManus, 1995) giving LWT rare independence to experiment, provoke and advocate (Waisanen, 2018), increasing its credibility. This is perhaps best demonstrated by Oliver’s takedown of the coal industry, Bob Murray and Murray’s subsequent retaliatory SLAPP suit. Unbound by FCC guidelines, HBO (Brodie, 2019) also have relaxed attitude toward profanity. The use of profanity is generally frowned upon by American society, which stands in stark contrast to British attitudes (Moore, 2015, November 10). Oliver, being British, is thus free to incorporate the swearing of colloquial English in the show. This allows him to lean into his cultivated comedy style, rather than adjust it for HBO, which further provides him with a sense of authenticity.

In summary, we identified six main features that separate LWT from other popular US satire shows: a longer segment, calls-to-action, big stunts, guests highlighting content, no commercial breaks, and profane language.

The host effect

What truly makes each satire show original are the hosts; the one thing other shows cannot replicate. The host affects a range of factors that impacts the popularity of the show. Comedy style, for example, affects individual message processing and in turn the resonance of a joke (LaMarre et al., 2014). Thus, the

comedy style of a host will affect the program's entertainment value. As Oliver is both host and executive producer, his comedy influences both content and presentation.

TDS is a case study of how hosts influence content and presentation. In 1996, the show focused on pop-culture content under host Craig Kilborn. In the Jon Stewart era, the focus shifted to satirizing news. Under Trevor Noah, TDS moved away from the heavy critique of Fox News that characterized Stewart's tenure, and increased references and acts targeting a younger audience. These alterations are difficult to make without changing hosts because what works for one comic can backlash against another, particularly if it is perceived as disingenuous, clout chasing or offensive; exemplified by the LNSM segment "Jokes Seth can't tell" or SNL's Weekend Update joke swap skit.

In a highly competitive environment, the resonance of the host persona is an increasingly competitive advantage (Edgerly et al., 2016), as resonance creates a bond between audience and host. The bond goes beyond how information is presented and draws strength from the persona of the host as a credible and likeable character. Audiences judge program credibility based on the perceived fairness, completeness, accuracy, trustworthiness and balance of the information presented, whereas facial gestures, vocal inflections and personality (i.e. showmanship) affects the credibility of the host (Vraga et al., 2012). The likability of a host can be evaluated using four criteria: sensitive, humble, likeable and competent (Spangardt et al., 2016). These appraisals ultimately influence the trust audiences place in the show, whether that is "trust to be entertained" or "trust in the information." As such, evaluations of likability and credibility of both host and show affect audience engagement with programs, as shown in Spangardt et al. (2016) investigation of radio hosts. We argue, in accordance with user and gratifications theory, which when the psychological needs of audiences are compatible with the host's style, audiences are more likely to interact with a show, as compatibility positively affects the show's perceived relevance (Edgerly et al., 2016). If the host provides what the audience are searching for, whether trustworthy information or ensured entertainment, they are more likely to tune in.

In short, the host matters (Edgerly et al., 2016; Spangardt et al., 2016; Vraga et al., 2012). This is especially true for LWT, a host-centric show which does not surround John Oliver with correspondents, a live band, or respondents. The unique constant of LWT is Oliver. Perceived credibility and likability of John Oliver could thus be decisive factors to explain the appeal of LWT.

Method

As this paper seeks to understand, not explain, behavior a qualitative research design was employed to draw upon insights from viewers' expertise knowledge

on the research subject (Gill et al., 2008). Eleven face-to-face semi-structured interviews with young adults, self-identifying as fans of LWT, were held over three interview cycles. While the number of interviews are limited, theme saturation occurred after the ninth interview, indicating that the research was exhaustive. To increase the credibility and dependability (Bryman, 2012) of the results, respondent validation during the interview process was included, and a complete record of the research process has been preserved.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants to ensure that all respondents self-identified as fans of LWT, spoke English to a satisfactory level, and were between 18 and 30 years old. Other characteristics were recorded (see Appendix A) but had no indicated effect on the analysis. Interviews were conducted in private, in English, at the University of Amsterdam. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (access all transcripts here). All respondents identified to the left of the political spectrum and all, save one, had a prior interest in politics. The respondents had a variety of cultural backgrounds, overwhelmingly European, and were anonymized using Aesir pseudonyms.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable method when considering time, financial restrictions, probing (Bryman, 2012) and the non-sensitive nature of the discussion subject (Gill et al., 2008). At the end of each interview, the interviewer summarized the interview and offered each respondent a chance to clarify, correct and/or add to their responses to increase respondent validation and result credibility.

Table 1, the identified specifics of the LWT format, and existing literature on host effect inspired the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) and the selected sensitizing concepts. The guide supported the interviewer when guiding respondents through their thought process, focused the interview while allowing probing where further explanation was needed. The use of a semi-structure also enabled the cross-case comparability necessary for this research (Bryman, 2012) in lieu of an open interview.

The research design was cyclically organized to allow themes emerging in one cycle to be incorporated into the following one, allowing the insights gained from each cycle to improve the following cycle (van Selm & Helberger, 2019) for a more exhaustive investigation. In the first cycle of data collection, four interviews were conducted and subjected to open thematic analysis. Following appropriate adjustments to the interview guide, another cycle of four interviews were conducted. The third and last cycle only included three interviews due to one drop-out.

The data was analyzed using manual theoretical thematic analysis, rather than inductive or automated. As such, the analysis had a top-down approach with only relevant sections of the interviews, those where the research question was answered, and were analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, sections treating dislikes of LWT were not coded, and concept-indicators

(see Appendix C) were constructed to increase the resulting dependability. Initially, open coding was applied to all transcripts to develop a set of codes, which were used in a second round of directional coding. Following the second round of coding, themes could be established and reviewed. Only themes mentioned in two or more interviews were considered valid which, after 11 interviews, resulted in a total of 25 themes, categorized into three motivational concepts: format, content, and host.

Findings

Effective storytelling – format and content

“He tells the story ... in a really comprehensive way and I can follow everything he says ... Step by step, and it’s a clear structure” (Oden)

The way LWT is structured contributes to increased coherency and a sense of completeness. Respondents said that the clear structure of the show enabled the introduction of complicated concepts in a comprehensive manner, making the argumentation understandable. They specifically appreciated the Main Story Tonight for its longer runtime because it enables sought-after in-depth research and analysis. Respondents perceived an added value of watching the show as the time spent watching, relative to the amount of information received, was considered beneficial. They also acknowledged the difficulty of gathering and structuring the same amount of information through personal research.

The originality and diversity of topics covered by the show increased the show relevance, as LWT sometimes covered topics that the respondents either knew very little, or nothing, about which created a sense of suspense and novelty. With its diversity of topics, it was easier to find a topic of interest (Freja), and by covering more than Trump (Oden), LWT stood out from other contemporary satire shows in a positive way. LWT’s tendencies to present viewers with evidence/references was considered a unique and good feature of the show as it made respondents feel like they were presented with a complete picture which increased the credibility of the information presented.

The narrative flow of the show was said to heighten the viewing experience. The lack of advertisement breaks, good writing and perceiving each episode as a polished product were attributed as contributing to effective and engaging storytelling. Frej directly credited these features to the weekly format, as it provides the producers with enough time to construct an effective narrative.

The critique of both media and politics was another identified positive of the show. Ultimately, the show’s ability to assign blame relates back to a desire for context as it allows viewers to understand from where the issue stems. Calls-to-action were praised by respondents as this feature enabled viewers to

channel emotions about the issues presented. The calls-to-action were appreciated for their accessibility and how they functioned as either an extension of the show, or inspired respondents to learn more on their own. Their existence was closely connected to a sense of empowerment, just as respondents also felt empowered by feeling more informed by watching the show. By inspiring real-world engagement, critical thinking and further research of a topic covered, LWT not only stands out on the US journalistic satire market but also empowers viewers by channeling their emotions and emphasizing viewers' agency. If LWT were to follow traditional norms of objectivity, calls-to-action and critiques would be impossible, as they encourage specific actions and assigns blame/praise.

Yet, all respondents stated that they enjoyed the credibility of LWT because of its unbiased, or rather, balanced narrative. Thus, not unbiased as in without a preference, but rather balanced in terms of presenting opposing views. There was consensus that LWT does not neutrally present issues, but it was argued that you can "hold a strong opinion [. . .] and still have a balanced discussion" (Loke). Thus, the opinion inclusivity of the show was linked to seeking out both unbiased and credible information.

If the show presented differing opinions, it was not considered problematic that the show had opinions to begin with. LWT does not have "to abide by certain values, to stand objectively, and I don't think I would watch it if it did" (Idun). Two respondents even went as far as stating that they specifically seek out Oliver's perspective on issues. Justifications for enjoying the opinionated content of LWT fell into one of two categories (agreements with previously held beliefs were coded as reliability, and agreeing with the opinion expressed on the show were coded as agreement); respondents either felt validated through socially belonging with others when exposed to likeminded opinions (agreement) or they enjoyed seeing Oliver articulate their own feelings (reliability).

Both stunts and guests added entertainment value. However, no respondent mentioned guests unless prompted, and they agreed guests were not central to the show. Some even enjoyed the lack of guests because the discussion was better, focused, and because it is John Oliver they came for.

Host persona – the Oliver Twist

"Even if you do agree with the political opinions they express, then you might not like them as a presenter, as a personality, there is more to it" (Loke)

It became apparent through the interviewing process that liking, trusting, relating and connecting with the host personality were important elements of the show's appeal. In response to the opening interview question: "what do you like about LWT?," seven respondents listed John Oliver unprompted. In

general, the positive reception of Oliver as a likeable person was due to his appearance, perceived humility and genuineness, which was strengthened by his normalness of appearance. Oliver was humanized through his use of self-deprecating humor that presented him as a person without ego, making him approachable – the most noted feature of appreciation of his person.

He was considered a competent host, sensitive to the opinions of others, who was a trustworthy source of information because of his genuine personality and tendency to reference sources. He was considered fair in his judgment because he presents different perspectives with brutish honesty even when it concerned his own person. Respondents praised him for his delivery and ability to “make the jokes come full circle” (Höder), as well as being able to present complex issues in an understandable, and relatable way. Thus, being a talented showman further contributed to his credibility.

However, respondents also claimed that relating to Oliver was a reason for liking him. While some defined it as relating through shared opinions, others related through his sense of humor or energy. Two respondents even mentioned having an emotional connection with him. Balder proclaimed a platonic love of Oliver’s character, whereas Freja claimed “a special connection” with Oliver, later defined as “potential friendship.” Thus, transforming Oliver from host to friend, even though the respondents were aware that the relationship was parasocial.

Additional insights to previously established motivations

”The entertainment part is not solely humour. [. . .] The entertainment itself comes from the fact that I am presented with interesting cases, or an interesting topic, which is presented in a relatable or rather simplified or understandable way. And then on top, he is a comedian.” (Idun).

The above sections deal with identifying motivations from responses that were not in direct relation to the previously established motivations in [Table 1](#). This study also confirmed those nine theoretical motivations, implying that motivations for viewing infotainment are indeed a mix of motivations for viewing both informative and entertainment media. While all theoretical motivations were cemented, our understanding of five of those motivations was also expanded.

The strongest motivations for watching LWT were to be informed and entertained, yet the show was rarely described as a way of enhancing news consumption. Instead, respondents praised the in-depth information on a single topic; a topic different from “headline news” (Frej), more “niche” (Heimdall) and “relevant also in the long term” (Tyr). Respondents enjoyed that the show provided background, analysis, and stressed implications, leading us to understand that contextualization is a motivation. Thus, watching

LWT was not simply about building knowledge width, but also depth. Consequently, the information motivation ought to be understood as going beyond surveying news and incorporate understanding them.

There existed an evident overlap of the motivation for information and for context. How does one distinguish between the two when context is simply information necessary to process the initial information? Given this overlap, we renamed the two motivations to better distinguish between the gratifications sought by each. Information became *learning* i.e. increasing factual knowledge. Context became *understanding* i.e. connecting information with implications. Audiences may turn to news for learning but turn to satire for understanding. Indeed, understanding the news was a dominant descriptive factor for the appeal of LWT.

All respondents mentioned that they find the show funny, but some also noted an enjoyment brought on by understanding issues better or being exposed to new topics and fresh takes. The predictability of other programs was even mentioned as a reason for watching LWT instead. The entertainment motivations should therefore not be considered as solely hedonic as there appears to be a strong element of eudaimonic motivation as well. Apparently, there is more to the entertainment value of journalistic satire than comedy alone.

Enjoying the show's argumentative nature was linked with the search for a specific perspective, as an argument has a premise. But respondents enjoyed the opinion inclusivity demonstrating "different opinions from opposing sides" (Tor). This is either because all respondents agreed with the premise put forward or, as Marchi (2012) suggests, because it contextualizes opposing arguments and clarifies the stakes. As we cannot deduct which explanation is true, we argue that it is more accurate to describe the motivation for a specific perspective as a motivation for opinionated content.

LWT's humoristic approach to serious issues enabled some respondents to release anger and anxiety, but it was also able to create positive feelings. Respondents expressed feeling validated, safe and hopeful when they saw that others shared their opinions and negative feelings. Respondents were not simply searching for an emotional release, but an emotional response, because it was not just about releasing negativity but also creating positivity.

Beyond confirming and expanding our understanding of the theoretical motivations established in Table 1, we also identified two additional ones: host and inspiration. Hosts impact both delivery and narrative flow, but also the show's credibility through their own perceived credibility, likability and relatability, resulting in a motivation both hedonic and eudaimonic in nature. Inspiration, on the other hand, is eudaimonic and refers to the feelings expressed by respondents as both empowered and engaged by the show. Empowered by identifying their own agency and increasing said agency by becoming more informed; engaged by the shows' encouragement of critical thinking and its ability to motivate further research.

Table 2. New Framework of Motivations for Journalistic Satire Consumption.

| Motivations | Original indicators (Table 1) | New indicators | Type |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Entertainment | Fun, Thrill, Excitement, Funny, Entertaining | Learning, Understanding, Interesting | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Learning | Surveillance, Learning the news | Beyond the headlines | Eudaimonic |
| Understanding | Voter guidance, Surveillance, Context, Comprehension | Analysis, Implications, Background information, Understanding | Eudaimonic |
| Unbiased | Thought-provoking experiences, Unbiased, Truthful | Opinion inclusivity | Eudaimonic |
| Opinionated content | Reinforcement, Liberal, Truthful | Argumentative approach | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Emotional response | Acting out emotions, Being moved | Create positive emotions, Release negative emotions | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Host | – | Likeability, Credibility, Identification, Emotional attachment | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |
| Inspiration | – | Channel reaction, Empower, Further research | Eudaimonic |
| Enhance social interactions | Social sharing of emotions, Anticipated communications | – | Eudaimonic |
| Relatable content | Being moved, Social sharing of emotions, Vicarious experience | – | Eudaimonic |
| Enhance news consumption | Makes news more interesting/fun | – | Hedonic, Eudaimonic |

Our findings are integrated with Table 1 in Table 2 to form a framework of motivations, including old and new indicators, for consuming journalistic satire.

Discussion

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it is hard to make broad generalizations on such a limited sample size, even though thematic saturation was achieved well-before the last interview. We hope that future research into satire consumption will benefit from the framework established, either as a moderating variable or to expand upon the framework. However, there are a few insights beyond the framework of motivations that we would like to highlight.

Firstly, being entertained is not only about triggering emotions but also cognitive and social experiences (Bartsch & Viehoff, 2010). It is easy to consider the entertainment element of journalistic satire in terms of comedic jokes. However, entertainment goes beyond jokes and laughter into covering interesting stories through an engaging narrative. Information can, in itself, be entertaining depending on how it is presented. Therefore, the information and entertainment motivation are interdependent, and more research is needed to

understand how, and if, they indeed can be separated. If they cannot, what does that imply for news production and definitions of due impartiality (Bailey, 2018)?

Second, by subdividing the information motivation into learning and understanding we can begin to understand why audiences consume different satire programs. Respondents praised the longer segment of LWT as a defining, unique and appealing part of the show, emphasizing the background information, analysis and evidence provided. Acknowledging that the information sought from LWT viewers is largely driven by understanding could inspire future political satire subgenres like advocacy satire (Waisanen, 2018), journalistic satire (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020) and investigative comedy (Nicolai et al., 2022). Shows with longer segments, like LWT and LNSM, could potentially be separated from TDS and LSSC in terms of learning versus understanding, if we experimented with satire typologies using a bottom-up approach: as in based on gratifications sought rather than content presented.

Third, the existence of an inspiration motivation supports the argument that young adults want to civically engage (Galan et al., 2019), but as proposed by Bennett (2008) existing institutions do not motivate them to do so. Disengaging from news is not the cause but rather the symptom of failing news narratives (Bennett, 2008, p. 2). Clinging to the traditionally disengaged unbiased news anchor, rather than an engaging showman, could contribute to young adults' declining news interest. It was evident that the host mattered a great deal for the enjoyment of LWT which empirically strengthens Edgerly et al. (2016) and Vraga et al. (2012) findings supporting a host effect.

In entertainment media, identifying with a character is considered important for increased investment in outcome (Cohen, 2006) and youths mainly get their news from three sources: the internet, trusted adults, and political satire (Marchi, 2012, p. 250). It is possible that forming a psychological connection with a host recasts the host as a trusted adult. Since all respondents also mostly viewed LWT via YouTube, perhaps LWT combines the three news sources of Marchi (2012), potentially accounting for some of the genre's popularity among young adults. Future studies into political satire ought to consider the parasocial relationship between audience and host to a greater extent.

Finally, our research supports previous findings that young audiences reject objectivity for a more authentic experience (Marchi, 2012). Journalistic satire, unbound by norms of objectivity, can provide this authenticity. Most respondents explicitly stated that it did not matter that the show was not objective because that is not the role of satire. While the news disseminates civic information to the public (Mindich, 2005), journalistic satire might be able to mobilize them (Davisson & Donovan, 2019; Meier & Berg, 2024; Waisanen, 2018); a different, but equally important, civic service. What if news and satire are not competitors, but rather allies in the pursuit of democratizing society (Boukes et al., 2014)? It would be interesting to explore what role young adults imagine

for journalistic satire, without placing it in a competitive narrative with traditional news.

Still, traditional news ought to consider these implications as well. Regaining the viewership of young adults might not have to be about sacrificing substance for hype or humor (Fox et al., 2007), but rather creating an authentic, narratively coherent experience where understanding is prioritized above learning. Building on this research, an authentic experience could be created by having engaging news readers, clearer focus, fewer subjects, and by evolving norms of perceived journalistic objectivity in favor of contextualization. Informing audiences about avenues for action/engagement could also be beneficial and simultaneously strengthen the civic dimension of journalism (Mellado, 2015).

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ORCID

Mark Boukes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3377-6281>

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