

Audience Capture: Rethinking Influencer-Audience Relationships within the Alternative Influence Network

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

YouTube has been described as a radicalization platform. This project aims to find empirical evidence for the process described by Lewis (2018) as ideological entrepreneurs "being radicalized by their own audience's engagement" (6). Various ideological entrepreneurs have experienced and described this phenomenon on platforms like YouTube, calling it 'audience capture' (Weiss 2018), defined as a "self-reinforcing feedback loop that involves telling one's audience what they want to hear and getting rewarded for it" (The Portal Wiki, 2021).

The data-sprint focuses on finding empirical evidence for this process, by investigating a pre-determined case study of the Rubin Report YouTube channel, hosted by political commentator Dave Rubin. We asked the following research questions: **How do audience engagement and feedback influence the radicalization of political influencers on YouTube? And how did the reciprocal relationship between Rubin and his audience evolve from 2013 till 2018?**

KEY FINDINGS

- Rubin's ideological evolution corresponds closely with the shifts in his financing structure.
- Rubin presents his channel as politically neutral, bringing together diverse perspectives. Comment sections reflect this, but there is a noticeable shift from "against Trump" to Trump supporter sentiments, aligning with the ideological leanings of Rubin's financial backers.
- Gay marriage is a key issue in Dave Rubin's content. The discussion shifts from the role of government in gay marriage to how gay marriage aligns with a conservative political identity.
- Comments about gay marriage lead to a statistically significant increase in videos where gay marriage is mentioned in either the transcripts or the titles.
- In the case of Sam Harris, our analysis showed that comments mentioning Sam Harris Granger-caused such mentions in video titles and transcripts on both a daily and weekly basis.
- The same people are not commenting consecutively throughout the years; there is significant influx and outflux of commenters.
- Rubin initially attracted an audience that primarily commented on the progressive TYT channel. By 2016, however, there was an infiltration of more conservatively engaged audiences.
- Rubin replied mostly to comments during his era with TYT. This engagement diversified over time, but direct replies from Rubin faded out. Meanwhile, audience engagement with his comments increased.

PARTNERS

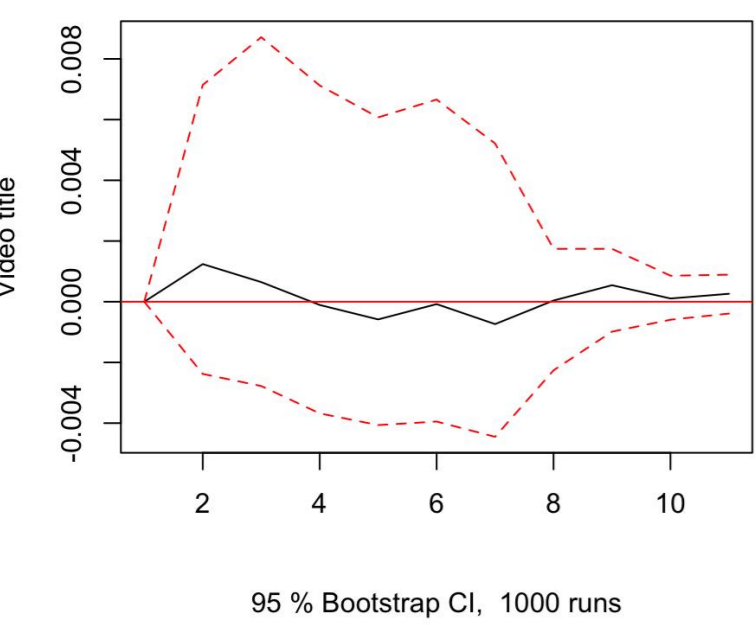
Media companies Dave Rubin partnered with throughout the years.

TOPICS

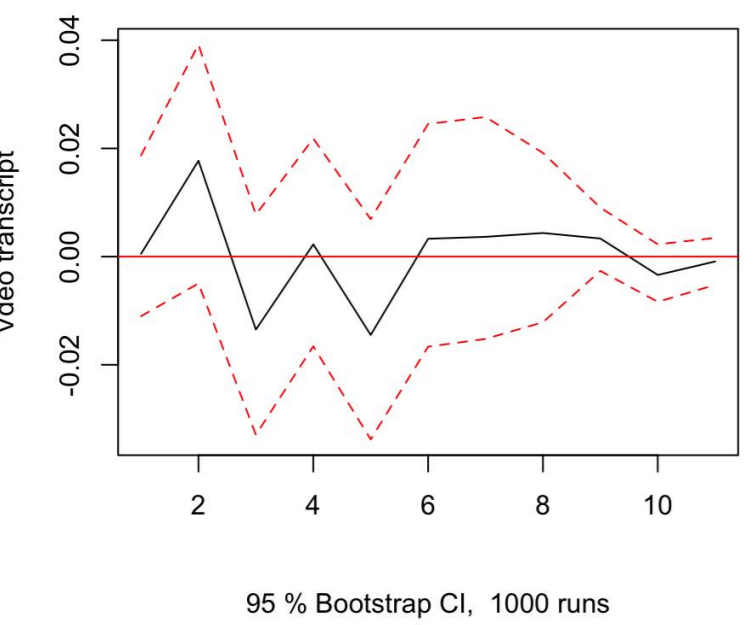
The figure represents the most mentioned topics by Dave Rubin in his videos compared with those mentioned the most in the comments by his viewers. It's interesting to notice how "gay marriage" went from being the main topic in 2013 to disappearing in 2018 in the video transcripts, while in the comments it barely appears in 2017.

The people mentioned are highlighted with name and often appear in the Rubin's Report as guests.

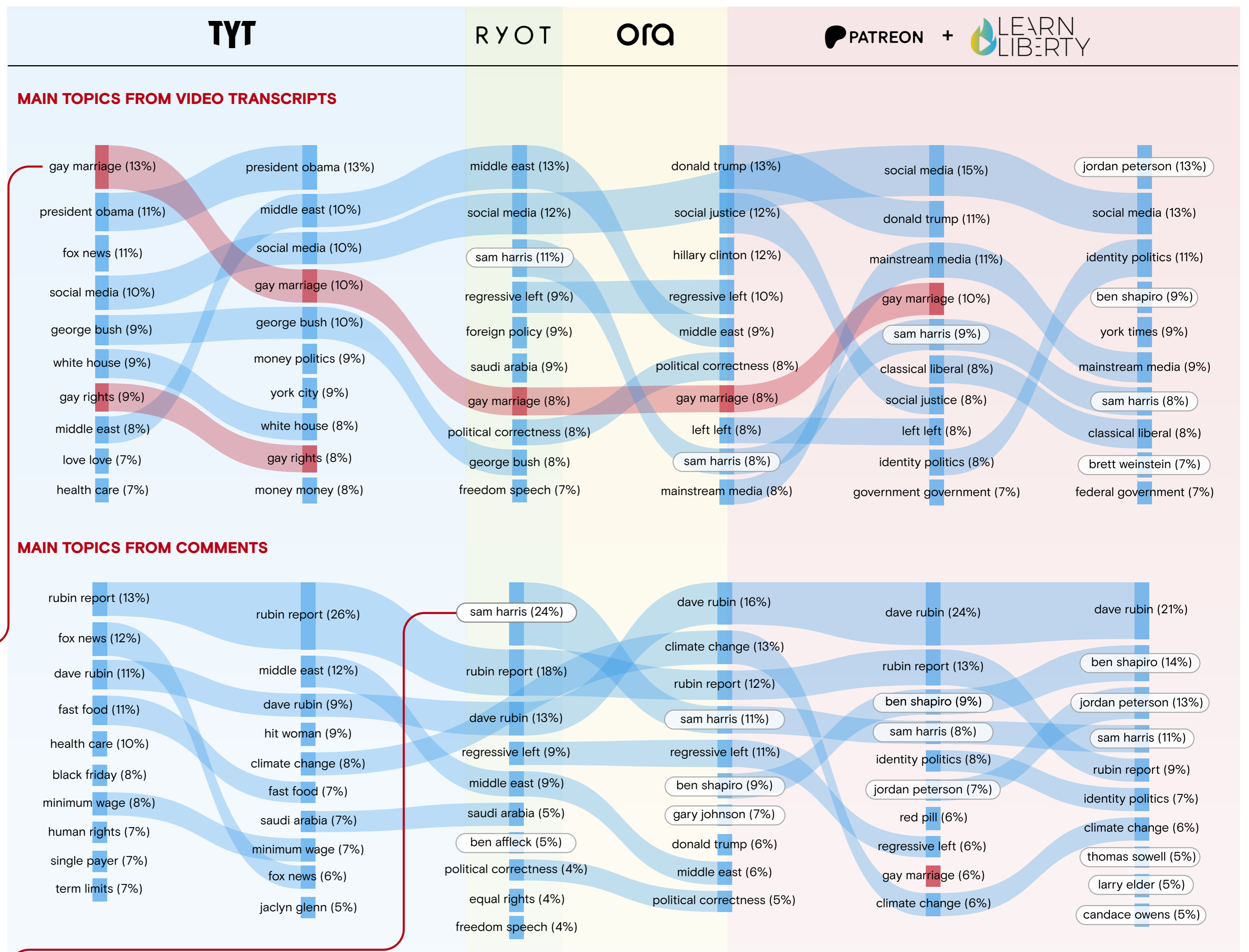
Shock (comment) & Response (Video title mentioning gay marriage)



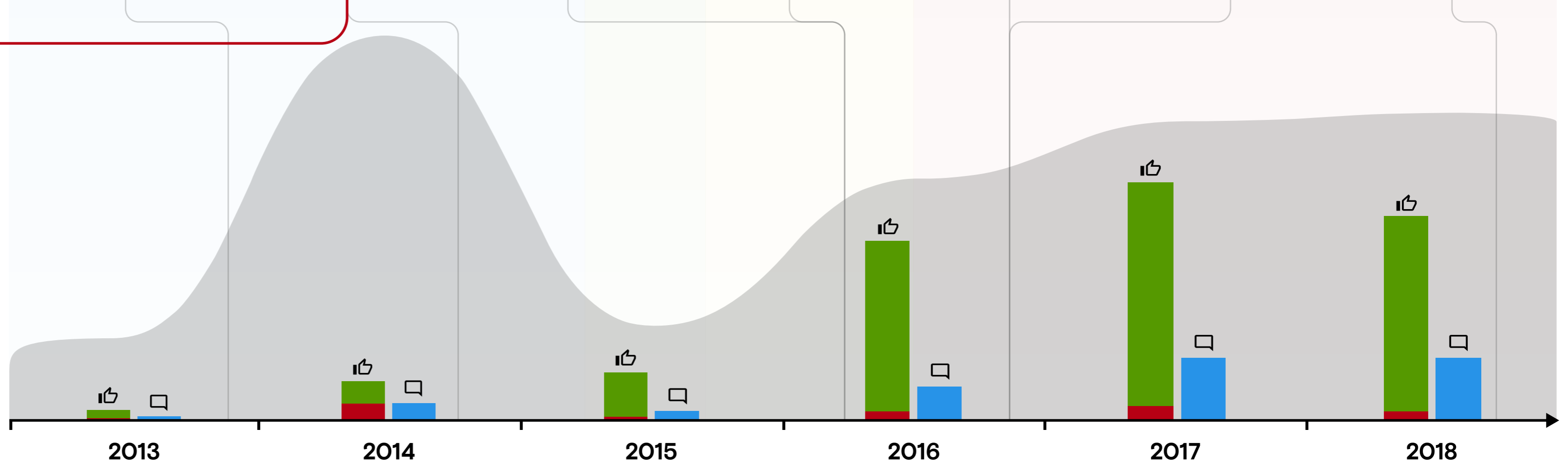
Shock (comment) & Response (Video transcript mentioning gay marriage)



DAVE RUBIN'S YOUTUBE TIMELINE, 2013-2018



IMPORTANT EVENTS AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT



In the case of Sam Harris, our analysis showed that the comment mentioning Sam Harris Granger-caused such mentioning in video titles and transcripts on both a daily and weekly basis.

EVENTS

Important events that affected Rubin's career and relationship with his audience.

ENGAGEMENT

- Views per year
- Average likes
- Average comments
- Average dislikes

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