Proposed Framework for Online Shaming Crowds Analysis

by Nicole Dreispiel

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Professor R.J Maratea
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology

Table of Contents

List of Figures ..... **iv**

List of Tables ..... **v**

List of Models ..... **vi**

Introduction 1

Literature Review 2

The internet as a mass medium of communication 2

Psychology of shame 5

Public shaming in new environments 7

Public Shaming history 7

Public shaming online 9

Collective Behavior in Online Environments 12

Disinhibition and Contagion 13

Status degradation ceremonies 15

Online Shaming in the Public Arenas Marketplace 17

Analysis 22

Case study 1: Louis C.K 23

Analysis of Case study 1 24

Case study 2: Chris D'Elia 30

Analysis of case study 2 31

Comparison 36

Discussion 37

Conclusion 45

Bibliography 46

Appendices 61

List of Figures

FIGURE 1: LOUIS C.K'S POPULARITY INDEX SCATTERPLOT 25

FIGURE 2:LOUIS C.K SOCIAL MEDIA MENTIONS ANALYSIS 29

FIGURE 3: CHRIS D'ELIA'S POPULARITY INDEX SCATTERPLOT 33

FIGURE 4: CHRIS D'ELIA SOCIAL MEDIA MENTIONS ANALYSIS 35

FIGURE 5: LOUIS C.K SOCIAL MEDIA INFOGRAPHIC 61

FIGURE 6: CHRIS D'ELIA SOCIAL MEDIA INFOGRAPHIC 61

List of Tables

TABLE 1: SUMMARIZED TABLE OF MODES FOR GOOGLE TRENDS RAW DATA C.K 26

TABLE 2: SUMMARIZED TABLE OF MODES FOR GOOGLE TRENDS RAW DATA D'ELIA 31

List of Models

MODEL 1: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE SHAMINGS 42

Introduction

The internet has created a new arena of virtual notoriety where the private can become public with the click of a mouse. The past limitations of public debate -both physical and material- disappear once the content is digitalized, creating a context collapse -snap judgments without frames of reference- where the only information available regarding characters and issues comes from the inflowing posts by bystanders or those affected.

Online shaming is a form of public humiliation that takes place in cyberspace. Social media platforms lack contextual cues normally utilized by individuals when engaging in conversations; this absence of references causes users to interpret the original content through a disinhibited mindset. Displaying incriminating content on the web also increases the visibility of the transgression, broadening the audience of the shaming spectacle. The virality of data online has allowed for proof of social transgressions to quickly spread through various social circles, allowing more people to participate in "naming and shaming" the individuals involved. Including photograph and video proof of the transgression adds a layer of credibility to the story since the issue has been recorded and presented to the viewer for examination, quite like presenting visual proof of a crime occurring in a courtroom.

This study will analyze the sociopsychological attributes of online crowds, attempting to integrate claims making components into one conclusive framework of shaming. Online shaming is a form of claims making; However, due the properties of the Internet and the convergence of a shaming crowd, the process of claims making online develop different to traditional claims making.

There is a lack of theoretical analysis regarding the formation and behavior of online crowds. The researcher hopes to construct a clear image of the development of cybercrowds by looking at the issue through different stages of inception and analyzing the underlying behavioral patterns of the individuals and institutions involved. This paper will focus on the performance of online shaming crowds, not on the causes for the shaming episodes, and will refer to shame as the collective action of public humiliating a specific individual.

Literature Review

The internet as a mass medium of communication

Since the advent of the internet, there have been various studies about the effects new technology has over the social construction of reality. Some scholars regard these new venues of communication as favorable for social interaction since they do away with geographical and time barriers. Other scholars have argued that the new technologies can result detrimental to traditional socialization, robbing individuals from contextual clues, and symbolic interactions essential for successful socialization.

Some academics have argued that the worldwide web has revived the public sphere by allowing anonymous interactions between strangers to occur outside of immediate material reality (Papacharissi 2002). In this sense, social media platforms are akin to massive public spaces where individuals can express their thoughts to an audience of millions and expect to be heard by a couple hundred. However, internet communications studies have shown that interactions between strangers are limited, with more individuals utilizing their social media accounts as extensions for their real-life

relationships. Relationships based exclusively on digital communications have been shown to be mostly superficial and sporadic (Morris 1996).

Indisputably, the internet has changed the nature of social communications by creating new venues of mass-mediated interactions where social interactions are "stretched across space and may also be stretched out or compressed in time" (Thompson 2005:33). This differs from traditional face-to-face dialogical forms of communication since individuals no longer have to share the same spatial-temporal space in order to interact, they don't even have to be in physical proximity. However, Internet communications have the ability to incorporate dialogical components of communication into mediated interactions. Thompson (2005) names these exchanges *computer-mediated interactions* where intercommunications that are dialogical in nature operate through a mediated temporal compression. An example of this is the "comment" feature of social media platforms, which allows readers to respond and thus engage in dialogue with others online.

Changes in the condition of social interactions have resulted in the "reconfiguration of the reality of everyday life and the transformation of the ways in which individuals construct the lifeworld." (Zhao 2006:7). The digitalization of symbolic communication allows for socialization to take place within an identifiable context which can then be utilized by others to make sense of their conversations. This novel time-space continuum of communication has in turn made possible for "human association to emerge among complete strangers in the total absence of corporeal copresence" (Zhao 2006:7), resulting in "the formation of a new matrix of social contact, the maintenance of the subjective reality through text chat, and the involvement of the online world in the

socialization process" (Zhao 2006:2). Virtual forms of communication, therefore, expand social networks interconnectivity by allowing users to remain accessible at all times of the day in all spaces.

Additionally, the Internet has the capacity to archive essentially all forms of information that are published on the web. Not only is our personal data more easily accessible online, but it is immortalized in the databases of the social media platforms, since removing content from all sources is virtually impossible. The retentive nature of the Internet is becoming painfully obvious to a generation that grew unaware of the fact that their lives were not only publicly accessible but recorded in an information database. In the past: "episodes of youthful experimentation and foolishness were eventually forgotten, giving us an opportunity to start anew, to change, and to grow" (Solove, D. 2010), allowing people to learn from their mistakes in relative obscurity and continue with their lives without significant repercussions. However, by posting these instances online, we immortalize our past in an easily accessible public space, diminishing the ability to protect our future reputation. The internet's capability to preserve all previous information also works against the forgettability of shaming incidents. It does not matter whether the original incriminating post has been deleted, once it is posted online and it has become subject to public attention, it is highly probable that other users have immortalized the evidence by either duplicating the media and sharing it elsewhere or by recounting the story in detail and publishing it once more.

Psychology of shame

Psychologists have defined shame as a self-conscious moral emotion (Svindseth, & Crawford 2019) since we come to feel shame through the feelings of disapproval expressed by others, therefore internalizing the image others have of ourselves. While shame and guilt have often used as interchangeable terms, they are distinct. Guilt is a more private emotion since the regret arises from a specific behavior, whereas shame leads the individual to self-criticize their identity as a whole (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Leach 2017). Simply put, guilt causes the individual to focus on external behaviors and distinguish between their self-identity and the transgression. In contrast, shame leads the individual to self-focus on their misdeed and generalize their entire self negatively. While guilt is thought to lead the individual to self-improvement and forgiveness, shame causes the individual to isolate and self-castigate.

It has been conceptualizing that shame served as an evolutionary advantage for early human communities since it led to social conformity and avoidance of deviant behavior by other members (Cohen 2020). Shame has been studied in criminal justice scholarship as a psychological tool for the enforcement of social conventions; arguing that public shaming punishments are effective since they can be universally applied, and effectively dissuade transgressors because "the focus of shame on the self is acute and painful, which immediately causes the individual to seek refuge from the stares of others." (Coontz 2015:444). Neuro-historical approaches towards shame argue that "moral emotions play a crucial role in the enforcement of normative behavior in groups, they are firmly established in adaptive cultural domains like religion, law, and education." (Wettlaufer 2016:50). However, new studies on the usefulness of shame

argue that it lacks the constructive responses of guilt, since shame is "thought to be an "externalization" of the felt inadequacy in the form of angry hostility toward those aware of one's failure or otherwise vulnerable to one's wrath" (Leach 2017:18) A study conducted by psychologist June Tangney found that "shame-proneness is associated with an impaired capacity for other-oriented empathy and a propensity for self-oriented personal distress reactions." (1996:605), meaning that shamed individuals are more likely to externalize blame and respond more aggressively. Shame, therefore, lacks the self-improvement and reflexive qualities of guilt.

Shaming leads to an asymmetry in the power structure. As defined by Foucault (1976), power functions as a relationship between actors, in which privilege is fluctuating through interactions. In this way, power is an instrument of coercion, and even away from the discrete structures in which those actors operate. As it relates to shaming, the power of ownership over the individuals' public image is transferred to the masses that are now humiliating them, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and injustice. Due to the exterior nature of shaming, in that it is an external influence, individuals come to internalize their disapproval. The shamed individual feels powerless in their attempts to redeem themselves and see further actions as useless. This results in decreased self-esteem and a propensity to develop mental health issues. Feelings of shame have been shown to be associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Orth, Berking, & Burkhardt 2006; Andrews, Qian, and Valentine 2002; Tangney, 1991;), having a lasting effect on the psychology of the individual.

Public shaming in new environments

Public Shaming history

Public shaming is a form of punishment whose main feature is the infliction of shame to dishonor or disgrace an individual. Public shaming employs the humiliation of the individual in front of an audience to coerce them into further compliance of the norms. Humiliation involves the "abasement of honor and dignity and, with that, loss of status and standing" (Burton 2020), undermining the individual's status by bringing into question their virtues. Humiliation is, therefore, the public rejection of the individual's status claim (see Garfinkle 1956). Publicly displaying the transgressor and their wrongdoing to the rest of the community not only acts as a deterrent for similar crimes but conversely, leads to the association of a deviant identity to the individual being punished, causing the rest of the community to regard the transgressor as a deviant even after the act of the punishment has ended.

Public shaming has been a common form of punishment throughout history, routinely used as a punitive measure against criminals in colonial times (Preyer 1982). Traditional public shaming involved corporal punishment as a component to the spectacle of degradation; flogging, torture marks, stoning, and burnings, were utilized in almost all corners of the world as legitimate punishments for, mostly, moral or normative misbehavior. Physically punishing, branding, and embarrassing offenders of petty crimes was a recurring form of justice; criminals would be singled out from the community and have their reputation stained in front of their close-knit communities (Law Library 2020). The public spectacle of shaming the perpetrator was meant to "educate the public as to the consequences of sinful behavior and to send a deterrent message to both the

humiliated lawbreaker and others who might be tempted to stray from the strict tenets of colonial moral standards" (Haas 2017:2). These traditional forms of public shaming were relatively fixed; punishments were assigned, executed, and then they were over, then the punished could be reintegrated into society. Such practices worked in small communities since they helped deter possible offenders by making an example of someone known to them. When people knew their neighbors, social stigma was a powerful deterrent (Massaro 1991).

Traditional public shaming punishments started falling out of practice with the spread of Enlightenment idealism, which reevaluated the importance of human dignity (Stearns 2017). The 1791 ratification of the Bill of Rights included the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishments inflicted" (U.S Constitution 2020), led to a new era of punishment in the American criminal justice system; public shaming methods started to fall out of practice, with public stocks being abolished by 1804 (Stearns 2017). The era of public punishment was proceeded by the development of penitentiaries in the early 19th century ((Haas 2012; see also Foucault [1977] 1995).

Public shaming practices also became unsuccessful tools of social coercion due to the industrial revolution, and mass urbanization, which led strangers to live close to each other without the need for familiarity, this disconnection from traditional close-knit communities meant that the degradation of one's social status no longer had the same impact over an individual's identity in their social groups (Ziel 2005.). Since city dwellers are unfamiliar with the private life of those they encounter (Franck 1980), the stigma branded through public shaming became obsolete, and the more structured system of justice through courts and policing came to dominate how we conduct norm

transgressions. However, some public punishment measures are still present today, one example being Megan's law, which makes the information of registered sex offenders available to the public.

Shaming in our contemporary virtual reliant world can be devastating due to the increased exposure to our private information online. The connectivity social media platforms provide us as users have allowed for a new global village to come into being; we are more connected than ever before. People can expand their social circles outside of their immediate community. This global village has created a massive social space where people share personal information with fundamentally anyone hooked to a wi-fi network. Individuals are now capable of streaming their lives in real-time and record every aspect of their lives. However, this also means that everything we engage in can be immortalized online by others, be it a friend or a stranger; anyone with a smartphone can violate our privacy by exposing our identity online.

Public shaming online

Online shaming has become a recurring phenomenon of our modern lives. Also referred to as *cancel culture*, this form of public shaming takes the shape of social media posts "calling-out" transgressions of social norms by other individuals. Call-out posts include personal information about the perpetrator, usually in the form of pictures or videos featuring the individual, though they can also include the person's name, social media handle, or account. The posts have as an objective to publicly humiliate the transgressor by publicizing the perceived social wrongdoing in a public forum; thus, the denouncer calls on the masses to decry the action as blameworthy and hence shame the

transgressor. The behavioral transgressions that make part of the call-outs can range from breaking conventional social norms, like littering on the street, to socially heinous acts, such as hate speech. Though the boycotting and canceling of celebrities online has been happening since the year 2014, as a reference to VH1's reality show "Love and Hip-Hop: New York," the canceling of individuals by online crowds gained momentum as a movement in the mainstream online culture at the beginning of 2019 (Brito 2020).

This newly categorized trend of "cancel culture" involves calling out public figures, or companies, online and urging the online masses to withdraw “any kind of support […] for those who are assessed to have said or done something unacceptable or highly problematic” (Ng 2020:623). If successfully backed by online masses, the cancellation of individuals often leads to career downfalls and the firing of shamed individuals by their employers. Call-out posts often urge the accused, or those in higher positions, to take responsibility for their past actions; however, apologies are rarely seen as sincere and more drastic measures, such as sponsors rescinding their support or companies dropping future projects with the accused, are seen as the rightful sentencing against the accused.

Advocates of the online cancel culture argue that it allows the public to right the power imbalance against influential public figures that have remained unchecked (Beard, 2016). Supporters of cancel culture consider online shaming as form of social justice, arguing that the masses are "standing up for justice and equality" (Raicu 2016). They further contend that "Online shaming also gives people a chance to fight back, to voice

their disapproval of inappropriate behavior" (Solove, 2007:94) and that the added exposure of the web "empower[s] marginalized voices" (Kornhaber 2020).

Opposers of online shaming cite the lack of proportionality when it comes to unchecked outrage online, often causing the voice of the accused to be drowned by the incoming flow of statements against them. This is lack of proportional balance can be attributed to the absence of an objective authoritative figure that can act as a moderator between the accusers and the accused (Moosa 2014). Moderation of online spaces has been framed as an impossible task by social media companies; these private companies argue that “government regulations impermissibly infringe on the providers’ own constitutional free speech rights.” (Brannon 2019:2). Furthermore, social networks maintain that effective moderation of virtual spaces would entail crafting a set of norms congruent to each country’s Laws, therefore interfering with their ability to “grant to all citizens across the globe the American ideals of free speech” (Leetaru 2018). The U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996 "does not hold websites responsible for content posted by users" (Duggan 2014), therefore relegating the creation and imposition of community rules becomes the responsibility of the users.

Critics of cancel culture also contend that "cancelling" individuals leaves no room for self-growth, and online shaming ferments an "environment of surveillance and conformity" through fear of being shamed (Blackford 2016). From this perspective, cancel culture is not a movement for social accountability, but rather an effort to ex-communicate wrongdoers from the virtual diaspora (McDermott 2019). The problem, however, is that countless socially irredeemable things are posted or stated online every single day, so that “cancellation creates a culture of accountability which is not

centralized and is haphazard." (Bromwich, 2018). To this point, critics argue that cancellations are infective in holding the intended individuals accountable for their actions, with high tier celebrities that have been subject to online shaming still maintaining potent fan bases and suffering little consequence for their actions.

Issues of free speech and censorship have also been brought forth by both sides of the discourse on online shaming. Advocates of online shaming argue that holding other members of society accountable is a form of free speech and that they are in their rights to denounce any transgressions for the good of the community. Critics of cancel culture argue that the public shaming and subsequent boycotting is a form of censorship, meant to silence those being cancelled by invalidating their opinions. In an act of protest, more than 100 influential public figures -from writers, academics, journalists, and activists- signed their names onto a piece titled "A Letter on Justice and Open Debate" that was published in Harpers Magazine. The piece argues that "The free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted" further contending that due to cancel culture has "steadily narrow[ed] the boundaries of what can be said without the threat of reprisal." (Williams 2020). Harpers letter main argument is that the shaming and cancelling of individuals for their opinions leads to the stifling of public debate and subsequent self-censoring of individuals.

Collective Behavior in Online Environments

Considerable research has been done on the individual factors that affect people's behavior online; similarly, there are many studies about the psychological effects virtual

communities have on individuals. One of the main characteristics regarding crowd behaviors is the sense of anonymity a mass collective grants its members; anonymity influences members in crowds by allowing individuals to cloak their identities from the rest of the world and thus avoid being recognized. According to Le Bon (1895), crowds lead to a breakdown in social hierarchy and order, which leads individuals to lose all sense of self and responsibility. He wrote that crowds are characterized by "impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, and the exaggeration of sentiments" (Le Bon 1895: 20), because numerical masses embolden the exaggeration of sentiments the crowd assumes, thereby inflicting a sense of correctness and moral superiority among participants. The idea is that crowd members gain a sentiment of invincible power due to the sense of anonymity provided by their numbers; the concealment of identity fuels increased feelings of deindividuation in the crowd members. As expressed by Zimbardo (1969), "deindividuation results in a lowering of the threshold for expressing inhibited behaviors" due to weakening self-awareness of actions that generally induce guilt, shame, and fear on individuals.

Disinhibition and Contagion

This loss of responsibility is caused due to crowd members feeling as if they do not stand out from the crowd, a sentiment the immaterial nature of the internet exacerbates. Participants of online groups may not only feel concealed by the mass numbers of users partaking in the shaming, but also even more disconnected from the shaming target since they are not in physical contact with the subject. Anonymity has been identified as a factor that leads users to experience disinhibition, or a lack of

restraint manifested by people in online settings (Suler 2004). Suler describes disinhibition as the lack of restraint manifested by people online. He identified six factors that lead to online disinhibition. First, dissociative anonymity or the sense that one's actions cannot be directly attributed to them. Second, invisibility is the opportunity to be physically invisible when engaging in online discourse. Third, he defines ansynchronicity as the lack of real-time interactions with others, which means that there are no immediate consequences to our actions. Fourth, solipsistic introjection relates to the sense of invisibility and lack of self-boundaries one may feel online. Fifth dissociative imagination refers to the idea that the virtual world is separate from the real world and thus what happens online is detached from any real-world consequences. Finally, minimization of authority is caused by the lack of an apparent authority regulating online spaces.

Suler's conception of online disinhibition is noteworthy because it suggests that internet communication promotes irrational, exaggerated, and even hostile sentiments in a manner similar to how Le Bon (1895) describes the emergence of contagion, or the propensity of individuals to follow the sentiment of the crowd unquestioningly, in physical settings. Much of a crowd's collective consciousness emanates from feeling of power found in each individual participant's sense of anonymity that results from being deindividualized within a larger mass and loosens inhibitions due to a lack of accountability for their actions. Le Bon further describes contagion as a type of social influence where individuals are swayed by the behaviors and emotions displayed by other members of the crowd. They are, in other words, contagious and transfer from one member to the other until all those affiliated with the crowd share a collective mind. that

is driven more by animalistic emotional impulses than reason and social restraint (Le Bon 1896).

The loss of personal responsibility coupled with feelings of confidence acquired by the number of people engaging in a collective act often leads individuals to "yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint" (Le Bon 1896:17). In everyday life people operate in a collective environment where their actions often result in positive or negative communal feedback targeted at the individual (Park 1927), but oftentimes the shared actions of the whole often cannot be traced back to any one person. Members of the crowd may lose their self-identity embrace a collective identity (what Le Bon refers to as submergence) whereby they begin to internalize and mimic the behaviors and emotions being displayed around them. In other words, the interactions among crowd members create a circular reactive behavioral feedback loop: member will begin to imitate each other and reinforce their shared behavior as desirable – or may also be dissuaded from continuing if their actions are met with a negative reaction (Locher, 2002:16, see also Park 1927).

Status degradation ceremonies

Negative feedback loops are, in many ways, designed to unify likeminded normals (those who Goffman (1963) described as discreditable because their stigma or deviant conduct has not yet been publicly identified) by exposing an offending party's discredited character, diminishing their reputation, or altogether expelling them from the group. Harold Garfinkel (1956) defined this sort of ritualized public labeling as a status degradation ceremony designed to objectify the person, thus transforming them into a

social object representing a behavior or attributes that the rest of the group dislikes. Members can be degraded due to violations of group norms or for simply being labeled an offender despite not actually engaging in any sort of offensive or forbidden conduct (see Becker 1963). Dehumanizing an individual into a social object allows the group to project righteousness and objectify the person as an outsider, therefore stripping them of their status as members of the group and making it easier for the rest of the members to form a one-dimensional impression of the accused as a shamed *other* with a sullied social identity (Garfinkel 1956).

In order for a status degradation ceremony to be successful, the identity of the accused must be publicly married with the wrongful act so that observers come "to appreciate the perpetrator and the blameworthy event as instances of an extraordinary uniformity" (Garfinkel 1956:420). According to Garfinkel, denouncers identify themselves as representatives of the group that was wronged and incite witnesses to partake in the objectification and consequent shaming of the accused. For example, law enforcement personnel may force individuals suspected of committing crimes to perform a 'perp walk,' when they are taken into custody or paraded in front of onlookers while entering a police station of courthouse. By transforming they identity of the accused into one of the transgressor, status degradation ceremonies allow normal to reassert their membership and status within the group while socially distancing themselves from the condemned transgression, thereby demonstrating their righteousness and avoiding prosecution by association (Garfinkel 1956).

Online Shaming in the Public Arenas Marketplace

Although Garfinkel (1956) originally envisaged status degradation ceremonies as occurring in physical real world spaces, the concept can be extended to acts of online shaming in both form and function. Online shaming necessitates a denouncer attract public attention to the accused transgressions through an initial call out post or tweet, which is then spread to and by others who participate in shaming the wrongdoer. In many ways, the person or group who originates the shaming efforts are calling attention to an individual or issue that they perceive to be a source of social harm in hopes of getting others who share their point of view to rally against the problematized target. Spector and Kitsuse (1987), defined this very practice as the process of claimsmaking, or "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions" (p. 75). In other words, claims-makers attempt to diagnose issues, episodes, and conditions as problematic by attaching specific meanings to them in order to mobilize potential allies, garner bystander support, and minimize the impact of counter-claims (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Benford 1988). Often this involves more than simply appealing to logic; moral evaluations are made when claimsmakers label social conditions – and those that represent them – as harmful to society (Ibarra and Kitsuse 2003; Loseke 2000)

Oftentimes, moral, emotional, and outraged rhetoric is utilized to persuade audiences that social problems exist (Loseke 2000); and because claims-makers tend to be guided by personal interests, values, and experiences (Best 2003; Spector and Kitsuse 1973), their task is to convince others to see the source of concern through the same focal lens so that they are inspired to take collective action (Benford and Hunt 2003). At any

given time there are countless claimants disseminating an abundance of competing claims through the public sphere, meaning they are all competing with each other for media attention and social relevance and must therefore frame their claims in culturally resonant ways. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) explain that claimsmakers vie for attention by promoting problem claims in a variety of public arenas, such a executive and legislative branches of government, popular cinema, the news media, political campaign organizations, social action groups, direct mail solicitations, religious organizations, and now social media and other internet forums. Since arenas have a finite carrying capacity only a small number of problem claims can be recognized at any given time (Benford and Hunt 2003; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). The result is a social problems marketplace where claims-makers compete for attention "in the arenas of public discourse" that make it possible to disseminate their claims to the larger public (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988:70; see also Best 1990).

Given the competition for the limited resource of public attention, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) identify five selection principles that help determine which issues and claims are most likely to be recognized as culturally relevant. First, the large number of problems competing for attention means that claimants must present their claims in dramatic, persuasive, and beguiling ways. Second, Claims-makers must constantly find new ways to benefit from current events in order to remain novel and instill renewed importance into their claims. Third, social problems have an inherent competitive advantage when political and economic interests deem them important and adopt their causes; this means claimants benefit when institutional actors and public figures like celebrities endorse their positions. Fourth, the organizational characteristics unique to

each particular arena affect which social problems are considered newsworthy. Finally, broad cultural concerns and preoccupations at any given moment will lead certain problem claims to resonate more successfully with audiences. Public recognition, therefore, is most likely to be attained when issues and claims closely adhere to the selection principles utilized by public arenas (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988).

Denouncers who seek to draw attention to a social problem by publicly shaming an alleged offender must therefore have their efforts sympathetically received within a variety of public arenas if they hope to shape the public's perception of the issue so that others will also view the behavior as a problem. Should they succeed in getting the *legitimacy* of the problem established, claimants then must find a way to maintain social relevance for a long enough period of time to pressure corporate leaders and policymakers into action in hopes of rectifying the problem. This subsequent step, *renewed claims making*, usually occurs after the social problem has been recognized by public figures and officials but advocates feel further action must be taken to resolve the matter. For example, this could be accomplished by shaming additional targets as a means of showing the broad scope of the problem; or by piggy-backing a successful shaming campaign onto other relevant issues, episodes, and conditions that infuse novelty into their claims and therefore command ongoing mass media attention.

To the extent that we may view online shaming as a claims-making tactic, then status degradation is not in itself a means to an end. Rather, it's purpose is to identify prospective supporters, win their approval, and rally them into action in hopes of garnering sufficient exposure to compete for media attention that is necessary for claimants to spread their messages to the larger general public. Since news agencies that

continuously broadcast around the clock are in constant need for fresh material, they are receptive to claims that facilitate evocative reporting of unambiguous narratives that contain plenty of drama, action, conflict, and emotion (Altheide 1995, 2002; Snow 1983). Monahan (2010) describes this media culture as focused on public drama and suggests that news reporting now mirrors the "serialized dramas" structure of storytelling, resulting in new stories "that bear greater resemblance to popular fiction than to journalism" (Monahan, 2010: xii). This not only means that mainstream news coverage capitalizes on constantly breaking stories at the cost of providing meaningful depth and contextual analysis; it also suggests that claims-making practices that trigger viral online shaming events are particularly well-suited for the "evocative, encapsulated, highly thematic" and entertainment-oriented reporting logic (Altheide 2004:292), and epitomize the type of extraordinary and sensationalized real world events that often demand media "attenuation and issue redirection" (Ungar 1992:483).

Methods

This study utilizes data from two main sources: Google Trends, and Twitter. A case study approach was applied to conduct in-depth investigations of specific case studies and identify the underlying components at play in each circumstance. These qualitative methods are preferred since they permit the researcher to utilize multiple sources of data, therefore allowing the study to address multiple components of the phenomenon being studied; Case studies present the parameters of research by limiting the focus of research to specific incidents.

Google Trends data were collected first, allowing the researcher to identify important dates in which an in-depth analysis of articles and social media mentions would be necessary. Google Trends provided data in the form of "unfiltered sample of actual search requests made to Google" which are translated into popularity points. These popularity scores provide dates in which the public was more interested about the individual and went online to learn more about the controversies. The data was utilized to determine dates in which the individual's search popularity spiked. The publicly available data published by Google, "reflects searches people make on Google every day" therefore providing an insight into the popularity of a topic on any given day. After the dates were selected, the researcher utilized the Google search tool for selecting articles published on the selected dates. This allowed the researcher to review the tone of the articles and the information published on the days the shaming's took place; by examining the mood of the articles posted, the study can then determine how the issue was framed and presented to the public.

Once the dates were selected and articles had been collected, the researcher made use of social media data to analyze public opinion online, this data was mainly characterized by sentiment scores and media mentions. Twitter was selected as a representation of all other social media platforms due to the sites' popularity; with about 1.3 billion Twitter accounts, "330, monthly users and 145 million daily users" (Brandwatch 2020), the level of tweets produced by a second average of around 6,000, making the platform the fourth most popular social networking app in the United States (Statista 2019). Tweeter's data was provided by Brand24, a social media monitoring software that allows users to track mentions, the sentiment of comments, pinpoint

industry influencers, and "identify sudden changes in the discussion volume" online (Brand24 2020). Brand24 allows its users to monitor specific hashtags and mentions on social media platforms, thus, the application can collect all posts associated with the individuals being shamed by entering the names into the software.

The names of the individuals at the center of the case studies were entered into the software, collecting tweets directly relating to the case studies. There exits the possibility that tweets unrelated to the controversies might be included in the data as a mistake made by the software. This possible compromise of the data does not preoccupy this study since non-shaming Tweets mentioning the individuals in the case studies also augment the visibility of the subject on the social media platform's algorithm of popularity. The comparison of search trends and social media data allowed the researcher to isolate relevant days of visibility and analyze the shifts of the public's attention by looking at data published in subsequent days after the issues had lost relevance.

There was a comparison drawn between the tone of tweets posted on days with spikes of mentions and the tone of articles published on the days before and after the spike. All types of tweets were included in the software without concern for their tone, however, the researcher made a distinction between the tweets flagged to have a positive tone and those with a negative tone. The tweets were then read through in order to confirm that the contents were related to the individuals of the case study. Tweets including article link were flagged as influential since they showcased a clear connection of influence between social media platforms and media outlets.

Analysis

The internet has been the catalyst for new means for cyber-shaming and fueled the rise of cancel culture by providing the vehicle of transmission through which a vast array of claims to be disseminated that can marshal cyber-mobs into action; numerous instances of online shaming have come to the fore after being promoted in a variety of web-based arenas. Two examples of internet-driven shaming, the cases of Louis C.K and Chris D'Elia are useful in understanding how and why some of these events succeed in attaining media attention while others are largely ignored or fail to go viral. In both cases the shamed individuals are celebrities who have heightened visibility due to their standing as public figures, which means that they have cultural familiarity and media visibility. Yet despite their shared celebrity status, their cases differed in ways that allow us to better understand the importance of visibility and public support in the shaming process and provide insight into when and why shaming events may resonate through online arenas and into the media cycle where they become recognizable in the broader public sphere.

Case study 1: Louis C.K

Louis C.K is an American stand-up comedian, actor, writer, and filmmaker, who started his career writing for late-night show comedies (Letterman, Conan, Chris Rock, and SNL) (Biography 2020). He has received several recognitions for his stand-up specials and acting roles, winning six Primetime Emmys, the 2012 Peabody Award, two

Grammy Awards for Best Comedy Album, as well as multiple awards for his shows and stand-up specials (IMDb).

In 2017 he was accused of several incidents of sexual harassment by his show business coworkers; this led to widespread criticism and significant professional repercussions. Though there were already rumors about Louis C.K's sexual misconduct in 2015, publicized by the now-canceled Roseanne Barr, it was not until two years later that multiple women made their allegations against the comedian. The sexual harassment allegations against Louis C.K were first publicized by the New York Times on November 9th, 2017. The publication included the allegations of five women, most of whom are also active in showbiz—the allegations against C.K. detail his intent of masturbating in front of his colleges.

C.K. admitted to his sexual misconduct a day after the Times publication; however, the comedian had already been dropped by Netflix, F.X. Networks, HBO, TBS, Disney, and suffered an estimated income loss of $35 million from canceled projects. Since his downfall, C.K. has made impromptu appearances in various comedy settings, one being the comedy cellar in august 2018. His return to stand-up was met with harsh criticism by the showbiz community (Singer 2018). In December 2018, he reappeared when an audience member recorded C.K. working on controversial jokes; he was also met with a barrage of criticism for his attempts at humor.

Analysis of Case study 1

As evidenced by the Google Trends Popularity Search scatter plot, Louis C.K's search popularity exponentially rose the day the allegations against him were first published, hitting 100 points on the popularity index on November 5th. This information

is also consistent with the trending data that day, which shows that Louis C.K's name trended 10th place on Google escalating to 2nd place in the following day. A similar search for "Louis C.K statement" regarding the previously mentioned allegations trended 46th on November 11th, while "Louis C.K" trended 48th on the same day (Trends calendar 2017).

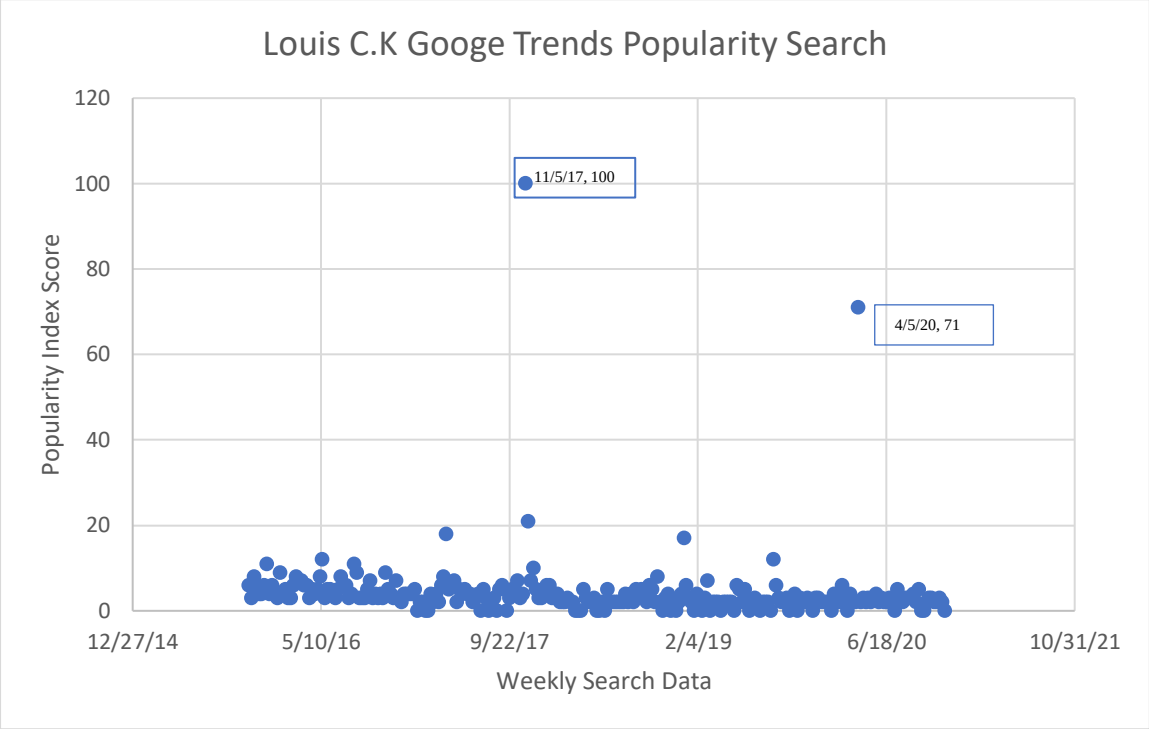


Figure 1: Louis C.K's Popularity Index Scatterplot

It can therefore be speculated that as traditional media began publishing about the ongoing scandal, the public took to Google to search for information regarding the situation, thus increasing the popularity points of the search term and bolstering up its position on the search algorithm and appearing on search predictions more often (Google n.d.). This can lead other individuals -who were not aware of the situation- to become curious, click on the search prediction, and read up on the incident, further increasing the

term's popularity points. The Google Trends data for Louis C.K searches is relatively constant, as evidenced by Table 1, with the mode remaining at 3 points of popularity for three years in a row.

Table 1: Summarized table of modes for Google trends raw data C.K

Year	Popularity Index Mode of searches
2015	3
2016	3
2017	3
2018	2
2019	1
2020	1

However, C.K.'s searches suffered a downfall in popularity in the subsequent years after the sexual misconduct allegations. This could be attributed to the comic's decision to withdraw from public life and social media after issuing his apology statement about his misdeeds. C.K.'s name also trended on Twitter at 4th place on November 9th, 2017 and remained trending on place 46 the next day (Trends calendar 2017).

Though the data collected in this study does not include social media data of the year the shaming episode happened, we can speculate the online crowd's behavior and volume by looking at Figure 2. We see a spike in the number of mentions and articles regarding C.K. on two different dates. The peak in mentions on November 5th is possibly due to multiple streams of articles regarding the controversy surrounding comedian Dave

Chapelle, who invited Ron Jeremy onto his show without regard for the 20 sexual misconduct allegations against the guest (Kaye 2020). Chapelle also previously invited C.K. upstage as a special guest during his quarantine stand-up series "An Intimate Socially Distanced Affair" (Young 2020) at the beginning of August. Aside from these reports, which do not entirely relate to C.K., some new articles regarding the comedian's past allegations (R 2020).

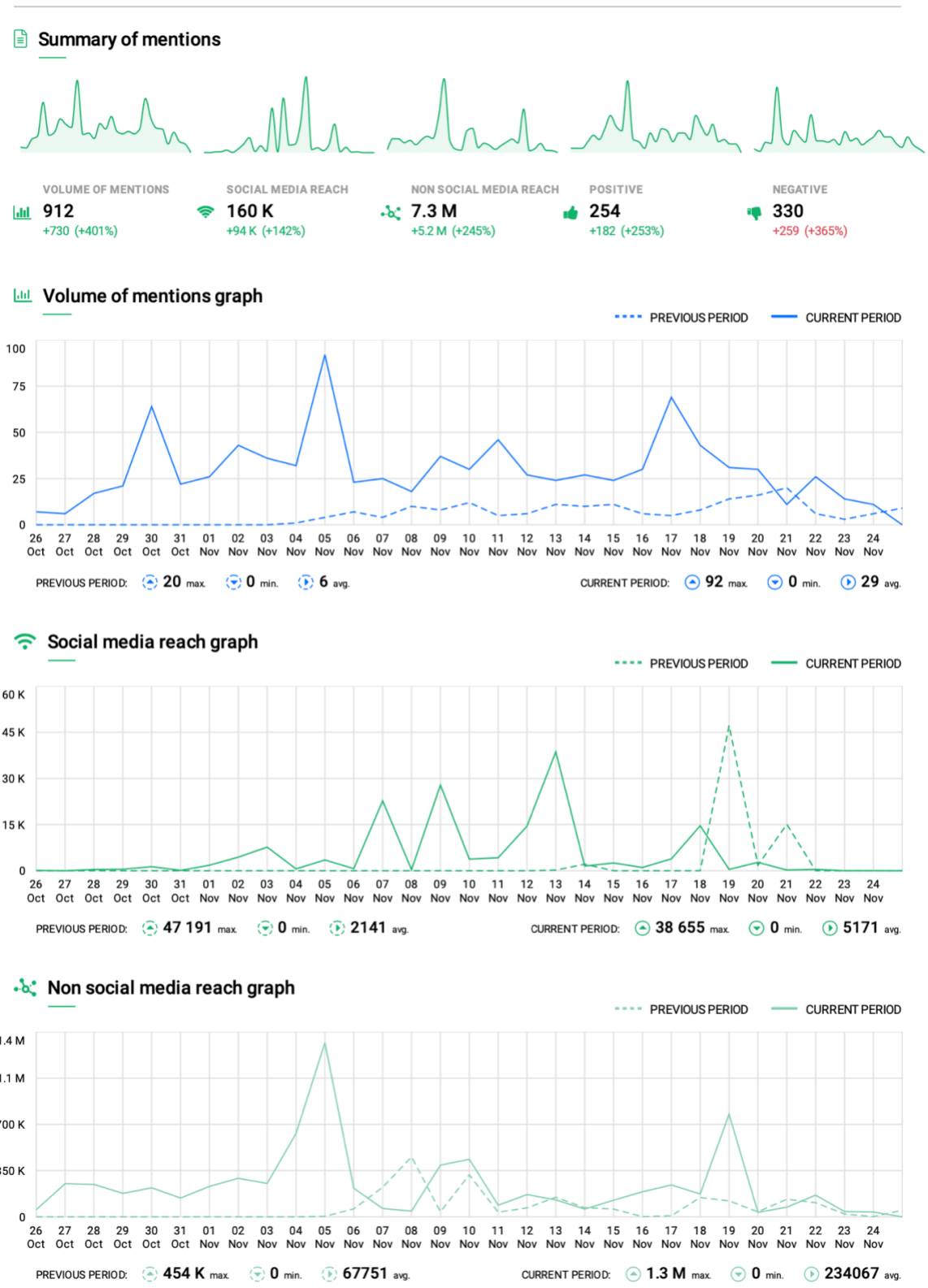
These presumptions can be verified by comparing the social media reach graph and the non-social media reach graph in Figure 2. Here we can see that the number of non-social media mentions heavily rose on November 5th; however, the social media mentions only saw an increase the days after the reporters had already posted online. This leads us to believe that C.K.'s mentions directly increased after new information was posted online. The fact that the new information barely referenced C.K. suggests that his name's simple mention brought back the memory of his past misdeeds to the readers' minds. This analysis would further suggest that any mention of sexual misconduct in comedy would lead readers to recall past misconducts by other comedians. If this assumption is correct, then the shamed comics will live with a reputational stain that will never dissolve and can be referenced without their involvement in any new situation.

C.K.'s spike in social media mentions on November 17th can be attributed to a meme posted on Twitter making fun of Trump's Lawyers in Pennsylvania, whom users' joked looks like Louis C.K with a toupee[1]. While social media users were busy being

[1] Mancino-Williams, A. [@Manda_like_wine]. (2020, November 17). *Marc A. Scaringi photograph being used as a joke by users.* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/Manda_like_wine/status/1328764415441850369

entertained by the joke, news agencies reported on C.K.'s inconspicuous release of C.K.'s first project in three years: Long-distance relationships, an audio series consisting of conversations between comedians, C.K., and his girlfriend, Blanche Gardin (Cappelle 2020). At this moment, we can see how important the crowd's attention is when it comes to online shaming. When C.K.'s scandal first broke out, the media had captured the crowd's attention – as evidenced by the trend in Google searches and Twitter- therefore, the formation of an online crowd was fast and extensive. Once assembled, the online crowd successfully shamed the comedian for his misdeeds en masse, causing the subsequent fall of his career and silencing the comedian online. However, despite the first efforts of the online crowd, C.K. has resisted cancellation. The comic has been softly making a return towards public and professional life, and he has successfully released a new project without being shamed by the crowd that had shamed him in the first place. This unsuccessful shaming can be due to the traditional media's failure to shift the crowd's attention towards the reentry of C.K. into the public sphere. On the day Louis C.K released his first major project since being online shamed, the public's attention was directed elsewhere. Ironically enough, users online were paying attention to C.K. but not in the way the traditional media wanted; without the online crowd's attention and support, C.K.'s return went unnoticed.

Figure 2:Louis C.K Social media mentions analysis



Case study 2: Chris D'Elia

Chris D'Elia is an American stand-up comedian, actor, writer, and podcast host, mostly known for his supporting roles on television series such as Netflix's You, NBC's Whitney, NBC's Undatable, and ABC's The Good Doctor.

On the 17th of June 2020, D'Elia was accused of sexual harassment of minors by multiple women online (Nolan 2020). The comedian was first accused on Twitter by user "@girlpowertbh," who shared screenshots of conversations alleging to be between herself and D'Elia when she was only 16 years old[2]. A separate account, "@SheRatesDogs," has since kept a thread of further allegations by other users regarding D'Elia's sexual harassment[3]. The thread has gone viral, sharing over 27 screenshots sent to the account from separate women who have allegedly been harassed by the comedian, and some of which claim this happened while they were underage. The account also claims to have over 400 direct messages of similar stories detailing D'Elia's sexual misconduct towards minors.

D'Elia denied the allegations in a statement published by TMZ news a week after the initial post was published (TMZ 2020). Since the publication of the accusations and following reporting, D'Elia's character was replaced in an upcoming Netflix show (Kit 2020), his guest appearance episode on Workaholics, as well as his stand-up special

[2] Rossi, S. [@girlpowertbh]. (2020, June 16). *First allegation of D'Elias sexual misconduct towards minors* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/girlpowertbh/status/1273036495591485441

[3] SheRatesDogs. (2020, June 16). *Thread of continuing allegations against D'Elia* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/SheRatesDogs/status/1273057240350552066

"White Male. Black Comic" has been removed by Comedy Central from their website (Moreau 2020), his acting agency dropped him (Otterson 2020), and many of his co-stars have made statements denouncing D'Elias actions as disturbing (Scott 2020).

Analysis of case study 2

The google trends data for Chris D'Elia's popularity index indicate a standard pattern of low popularity, with D'Elias mode of popularity index with the standard measure being 2 units of popularity. This means that D'Elias's name was not being searched for consistently throughout his years in the business. Additionally, when comparing D'Elias popularity score to Louis C.K's, we can see that D'Elia did not enjoy as high of celebrity status as C.K evidently due to D'Elias increased popularity score (3 points) being C.K's constant popularity score.

Table 2: Summarized table of modes for Google trends raw data D'Elia

Year	Popularity Index Mode of searches
2017	1
2018	2
2019	3
2020	2

D'Elia's name trended on Google at place 42nd the day the scandal broke out; he continued to escalate through the ranks throughout the night and ended up at place 5th on the 17th of June (Trends calendar 2020). As we can see below on Chris D'Elia's Popularity Index Scatterplot, two outliers stand out from the otherwise low popularity

values. Those two values correspond to the two weeks following the allegations' disclosure and suggest an unprecedented increase in the search for D'Elias's name on Google. This surge implies that users took to the search engine to inform themselves about the comedian after becoming aware of the scandal. Therefore, reports about D'Elia's scandal increased the public's knowledge about the comedian.

We can further strengthen this assumption by looking at D'Elias popularity index values. Before the allegations were posted, the comedian's popularity index consistently reports at 2 to 3 popularity points, with the maximum deviation being 7 popularity points on one occasion. The only changes reported in the search index data happen after the release of Netflix You Season 2 on the 26th of December 2019, in which D'Elia acts as an alternate version of himself. However, even after the release of the series, D'Elia's search trend popularity only increased in four separate instances, with the highest increase being 17 popularity points on the 12th of April 2020, the same day Netflix released his stand-up special "Chris D'Elia: No Pain" (Buss 2020).

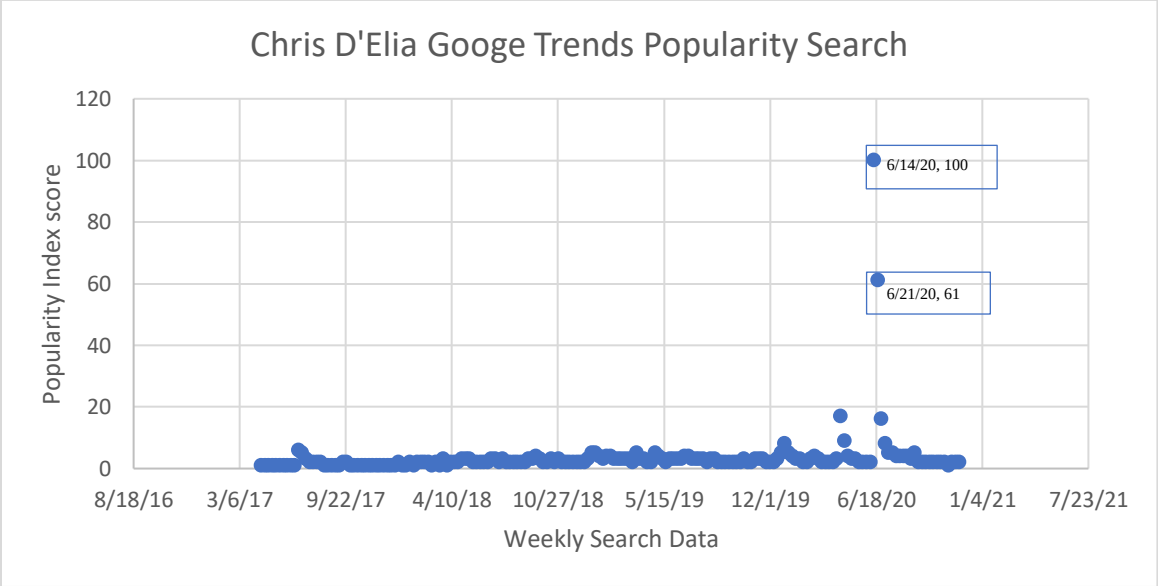


Figure 3: Chris D'Elia's Popularity Index Scatterplot

D'Elias' name also trended on Twitter at 12th place on the day after the allegations were published (Trends calendar 2020). Unfortunately, the data utilized in this study does not include social media behavioral patterns for the month when D'Elia was first accused and shamed. However, as shown by Figure 4, we can see a high spike in mentions on the 10th of November, followed by a smaller increase on the 18th. The first spike can be attributed to PodHub, a Youtube podcast channel, publishing a video of D'Elia commenting on a popular video of celebrities singing during quarantine[4]. It would appear that the before mentioned clip about D'Elia was part of a now-deleted podcast episode, and the clip was reposted in a fan account. The reposting of the video could have brought the issue to the spotlight once again, causing some individuals to remember the issue and, as evidenced by Figure 6, respond negatively. Furthermore, the reaction of the public to content featuring the comic leds to the consideration that his reputation and image has been sullen.

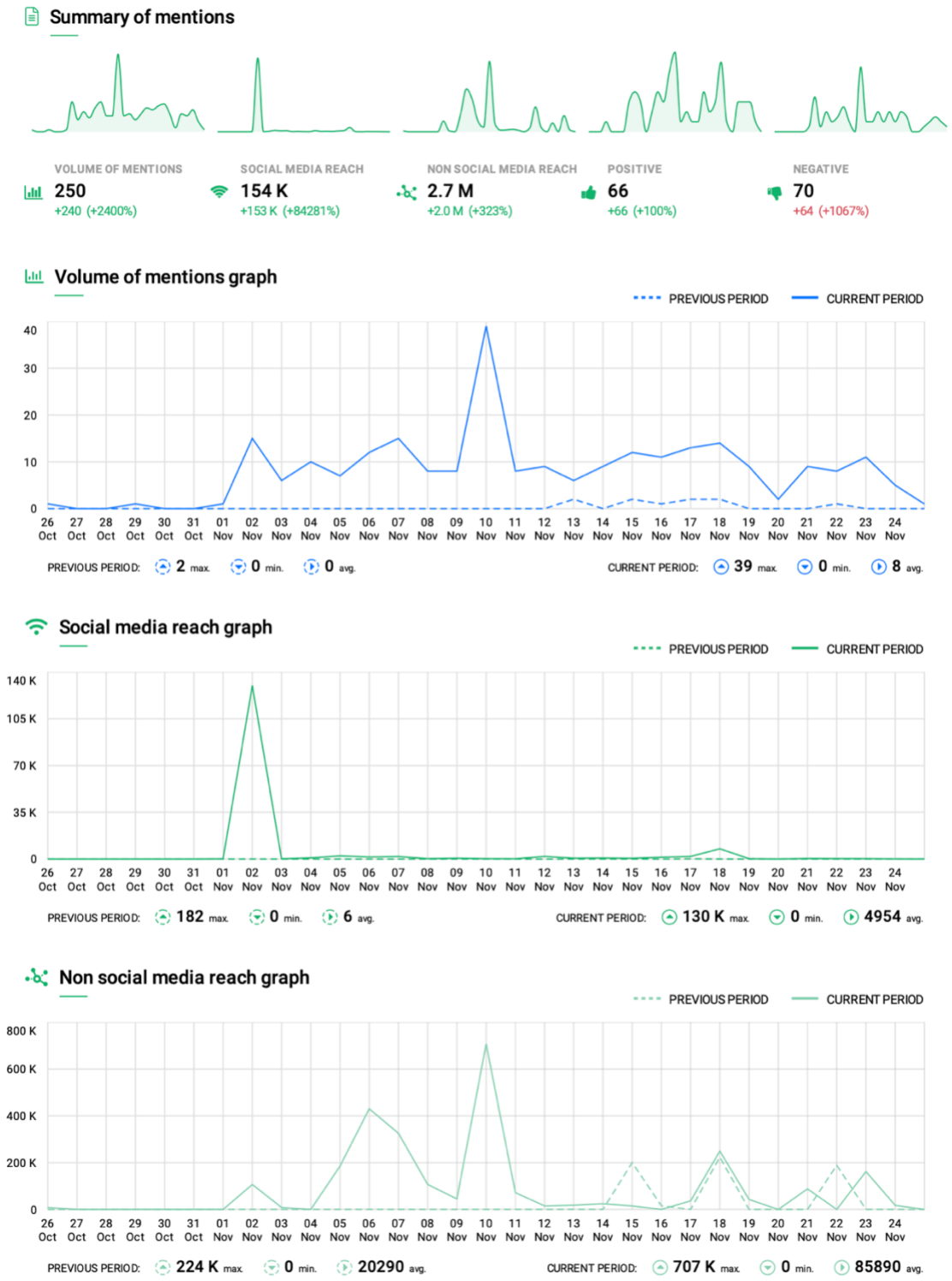
The second spike on the 18th can be attributed to comedian Whitney Cummings' interview with The Daily Beast, where she addressed the allegations surrounding D'Elia as his former co-star (Stern 2020). After the interview was published, Twitter users commented on Cumming's ties with canceled individuals focusing on her career instead of her comments regarding D'Elia's situation. This shift of the shaming target is not surprising once we realize that most comments posted about Cumming's were written by fans of D'Elia. The fact that comments were more positive than those of the 10th leads to

[4] PodHub. (2020, November 11). *Chris D'Elia Reacts To Celebrities Singing Imagine* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_fR6HxZki8

the conclusion that D’Elia’s case has already fallen from the spotlight and the public’s attention has shifted elsewhere.

Though there were two instances in which D'Elia's mentions peaked online, the bottom line is that there were simply not enough people involved to constitute a second shaming crowd. Additionally, the lack of content posted about D'Elia means that a following shaming is unlikely to occur since most participants of the first shaming episode have forgotten about the comedian. Without any external reminder about his case, the users will not be prompted to engage in what seems to be an irrelevant issue.

Figure 4: Chris D'Elia Social media mentions analysis



Comparison

D'Elia was accused online by a noncelebrity; this spurred an instantaneous online crowd, drawing the media's attention. The media first reported C.K's incidents, and the online crowd came into being after the reports had been published. This difference in the disclosure source can also explain the reasons behind each online crowd's life expectancy. C.K was called-out by legitimate sources -The New York Times, The Guardian, CNN- whereas D'Elia has been called-out by noncelebrities on a social platform. While the allegations against D'Elia are more numerous, the sources for almost all, excluding the original post, have been submitted as anonymous and posted in a collective thread of similar accusations against the comedian. C.K's actions were disclosed to reporters by his showbiz coworkers, who have signed their names to their statements regarding the incidents. The lack of transparency surrounding D'Elias accusers negatively impacts the legitimacy of the claims made against the comic.

Additionally, due to D'Elia's denial of the allegations, the Status Degradation Ceremony was not completely successful. By not admitting to the transgressions, D'Elia has essentially resisted having his self-identity transformed into that of a transgressor. Though the mainstream public might already equate D'Elia as a sexual harasser, his identity's complete transformation has not been accomplished. The transgressor must also identify with their crimes in order for their identity to be transfigured entirely; otherwise, there is room for debate and rejection.

C.K's public persona is higher ranking in mainstream culture than that of D'Elia. This means that more people are aware of C.K's works and thus have a greater interest in his actions. This attention translates as higher visibility and scrutiny, garnering traditional

media's interest to report on his lifestyle since more people are likely to be interested in the first place. However, D'Elia's smaller fanbase means that he has passionate fans, as evidenced by the petitions for his podcast to make a return and the positive comments defending him months after the allegations of sexual misconduct. In this sense, support within the viral community creates further resistance against online shaming. However, we cannot make a complete ruling regarding the successful cancellation of D'Elia. There has not been a second wave of shaming since the comic has not made any attempts to return to the public eye; therefore, we do not know how the public will react to his reappearance and whether they will attempt to cancel him once again.

Discussion

Online shaming crowds can be analyzed through the application of an amplified claims making theorem. To understand the process of online shaming, we must identify and analyze each level of development separately. There are three stages of development involved in constructing a successful online shaming: claims making, social contagion, and public arenas.

It is in the first step, *claims making*, that the initial transgression is disclosed and introduced into the virtual arena. The denouncer frames the social problem they are disclosing in a dramatic manner, hoping to rally support from other users by including morally outraging stimuli in their posts. Online denouncers already have a potential audience of millions with whom they can disclose the norms' violations. In such a broad audience and with the help of some passionate rhetoric, they are likely to find a couple of hundred individuals who will see the transgressions as legitimate problems. Additionally,

the dissociative anonymity afforded by the web's nonmaterial nature allows users to post their comments without fear of personal accountability. The ansynchronicity of virtual communications further reinforces this feeling of being unaccountable. Individuals disengage from their actions since they are perceived to occur in an extensive time-space continuum. The inhibition of social controls allows users to respond to outraging stimuli more impulsively and reach more violently due to their experienced feelings of disinhibition and deindividuation. The audience is no longer passive online since users can voice their thoughts on the subject matter and publicize them to the same audience that views the original posts. Moreover, as we have previously observed, the quality of online discourse tends to be driven by drama and outrage, resulting in the users' emotionally laden responses.

Once users conglomerate and actively participate in an online shaming crowd, they fall subject to *social contagion*. Users online encounter the shaming posts and are triggered by others' outrage, reacting similarly to that of the accusing posts they previously came across. The spread of shaming posts inundating other users' collective feed resembles the initial contagion of crowds. As emotionally infused shaming posts proliferate, more users come into contact with the situation and join into the shaming episode. The members no longer see their actions as independent of the crowd; they have become submerged in the idea of belonging to the debate's righteous side and, thus, shame the perpetrator. Additionally, users are unlikely to question the validity of the claims due to the numerous posts by members of the online crowd, which grants the claims an illusion of legitimacy since so many people believe them.

Claims making in virtual spaces employs the humiliation of individuals to gain collective support and become successful. The further delegitimization of the transgressor occurs through the process of Status Degradation Ceremony. The accuser individual is already perceived as an object online due to the nonmaterial nature of the web. Dissociative imagination causes users to perceive others as one-dimensional characters, rarely accounting for the individual behind the screen being represented by an avatar in social media. Members of the crowd further dehumanize the accused individual through the psychological process of deindividuation, where they feel even more disconnected from the accused due to the lack of physical presence. This physical and mental distancing from others allows users to objectify the individual further and create an impression of them as the transgressor that ought to be shamed.

Moreover, the formation of the online shaming crowd attracts the attention of media outlets, who expand the issue into a broader *public arena*. Media outlets then Media outlets are a relevant public arena for understanding online shaming developments. As a public arena, news media is also in competition with other arenas for the public's attention; the increased need for viewership has pressured news media to employ a *Public Drama Framework* in their reporting. The Public Drama Framework, designed by Brian Monahan in *The Shock of the News*, analyzes how mainstream news media coverage of social problems influences our perceptions of social reality. Media outlets have the capacity to influence public attention through their coverage of stories. The framing and presentation of social problems inherently affects the publics' perception of the issues and of the society at large because of the outlets ability to "bring attention to issues, events, and individuals that otherwise might not attract the general

public" (Monahan, 2010:19). When news stories are constructed to gain viewership instead of informing the public, they become *public dramas*: "a particular style of news in which highly dramatic and emotional information and images that can be fused into a compelling story are regarded as the most newsworthy and, thus, most valuable" (Monahan, 2010:xii).

The Public Drama Framework rests on the core assumption that news reporting is a form of social construction, designed by individuals who decide what issues are newsworthy and how these issues should be presented to the viewers. Both the news workers and the original denouncer bring forth to the public forum a story designed to be captivating and attract a crowd that will come to learn about the issue through the carefully crafted words of the news presenter or the online user. The first introduction of the problem aims to be enticing since the amount of attention it will obtain will depend on the impression it leaves on the audience. Therefore, both news workers and online users make use of dramatic frameworks to highlight the "elements that are likely to produce a strong and lasting emotional connection between the audience and who or what is being presented." (Monahan 2010:48). These emotional elements help the audience identify and connect with the story, urging them to follow the events and even react to the issue, further attracting their social groups' attention.

By presenting the unraveling story through a theatrical storytelling framework, the reporters hope to grasp viewers' attention and maintain high viewership rates. Online shaming's are similar to Public Dramas regarding the structural components of framing and storytelling. Both require the investment of an audience, and both tend to oversimplify the problem and promote a single narrative and shape the image of the

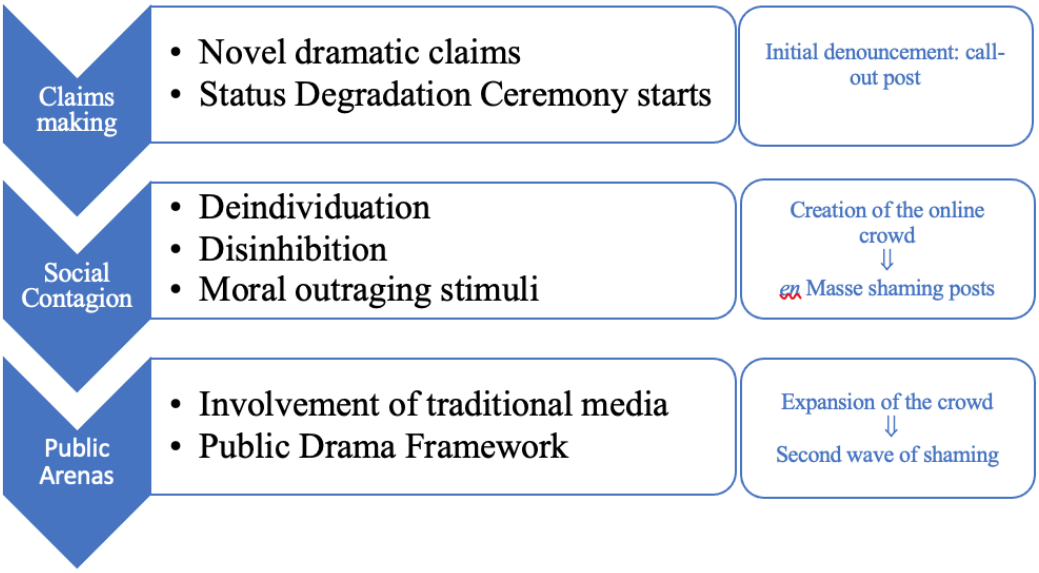
individuals involved to fit common archetypes the audience is familiar with. In a sense, while the news workers are gatekeepers that decide what is newsworthy and model the story to be captivating, the call-out's initial denouncer is the gatekeeper and designer of the subsequent online shaming.

Online shaming provides the characters with even more visibility. Due to the web's viral nature, the people involved in online shaming will have their information and likeness shared and spread across multiple sites without their knowledge. This extended visibility sullies the reputation of the user across social spaces. Reputation has always been a crucial aspect of human relationships, being the determinant of trustworthiness and social status; by sullying a person's reputation through public shaming, one could coerce a person into changing their behavior and conform to societal norms. Social interactions between acquaintances and strangers rest on reputational information as the base for first impressions. With more and more people resorting to search engines to get a first impression of a person; the search engine algorithms will display the content that received the most attention at the top of the search list, meaning that tweets and social media posts that were more viral will show up before the spectator without context and thus corrode the reputation of the individual even further. Unlike past public shaming practices, the reputational stain will follow the individual transcending time and space boundaries due to the archival properties of information storage granted by the Internet.

Additionally, when a similar issue occurs online, there tend to be callbacks to previous instances when the same problem occurred, thus revamping the original call out and bringing back from obscurity. However, the online public can experience a type of "surplus compassion," when bombarded with large numbers of posts condemning similar

issues. This constant exposure to outrageous News can lead to "outrage fatigue," which could diminish the overall intensity of outrage experiences or cause people to experience outrage more selectively to reduce emotional and attentional demands (Crockett, 2017).

The case studies utilized in this paper were selected in order to draw a comparison between the influence the two public arenas, the internet and the media, have over the claims making process of online shaming. In Chris D'Elia's case can be analyzed through the proposed online shaming crowd's theorem shown on the Flowchart 1:



Model 1: Stages of development of online shamings

Since the incident first broke on a social media platform the Internet is the main public arena that influenced the convergence of the crowd. It was only after the accusations had been made public by multiple users that media outlets started reporting on the story and following the unraveling events. The initial disclosure of the transgression was dramatic and novel: a rising celebrity had engaged in an immoral act. This call-out post in itself stirred users online, but the extension of the initial claim by

other individuals who had similar experiences was what drew in the online crowd. Once the claims were published, the online masses started disseminating the information at a rapid rate making the controversy go viral and be picked up by the media in a matter of hours. The accusations were seen as more legitimate once media outlets picked up the story, forcing D'Elia to make a public declaration of his innocence. However, the comedian had already lost the support of his peers, as his costars released their own statements condemning his actions, and the institutional support of his agency and employers, who dropped future projects involving D'Elia and erased past shows from their platforms.

Media outlets didn't have to mold the information too much to present the issue through a Public Drama Framework. There were already identifiable characters, an eye-catching issue, and everything was unravelling under the public eye. D'Elia's case is somewhat different from Louis C. K's, since D'Elia had just started getting attention from the public after his ill-suited role as a pedophile in the Netflix series *You*; therefore, he did not previously have a large fanbase nor as much popularity as C.K. This could be the main reason as to why D'Elia's shaming happened as a spurt, being short lived but drawing in attention from influential figures and leaving a trail of debris from the crumbled future endeavors of the comedian.

The shaming of Louis C.K was prompted by the media, not by a user online. However, most of the shaming occurred online. We can approach this case by shifting the direction of the attention influence from the online crowd towards the traditional media on the online shaming crowd's theorem. With this change, we can analyze how the mainstream media reporting on the controversy surrounding a well-known public figure

fomented the creation of an online crowd that proceeded to shame C.K. To start with, C.K.'s story has all the elements of a public drama. The people involved fall neatly into dramatic-style characters, with the women affected taking on the role of victims and C.K. being the powerful figure abusing his authority for self-gratification. On a personal level, C.K.'s status as a celebrity allows for further disassociation of him as a person for the users participating in the online shaming. The case against C.K. becomes a fight of the underdogs against a powerful figure, a tale audience members can sympathize with strongly.

An important factor of this case is the context in which it happened. Louis C. K's allegations of sexual misconduct happened while the #MeToo movement saturated mainstream media. The #MeToo movement gained momentum in October 2017 following the accusations against film producer Harvey Weinstein. The saturation of networks with sexual harassment scandals means that the public might have been more reactive to C. K's allegations. The public as a whole might have experienced contagion due to the rate at which similar stories of male celebrities' sexual misconduct accusations were being disclosed.

Though Louis C. K also lost the institutional support from his agency and business partners, he received backing from other comedians who spoke out against the complete cancellation of C.K's projects. One important supporter of C.K's was Sarah Silverman, a female comedian that C.K had also masturbated in front of, who stated that C.K should be given a chance to redeem himself and talk about the issue on stage. C.K has received constant support from fellow comedians ever since the allegations became public, some public figures instinting on C. K's return include Ricky Gervais, Janeane

Garofalo, Bill Burr, and Dave Chapelle. This insiders support could be the underlying factor regarding the possible return of C.K to the entertainment world.

Conclusion

Online shaming crowds have become a social phenomenon to be reckoned with. Their sporadic nature and collective power allow these agglomerations of anonymous individuals to actively shape social reality and social behavior. Though online crowds may seem a novel and frightening social phenomenon, the truth is that all behaviors expressed by the individuals of the crowd and the collective can be explained through claims making with the support of a few other theories. Studying the components of the behaviors allows us to gain a more in-depth understanding of the processes through which online crowds are formed and operate.

The rate at which online shaming episodes occur will keep increasing within the foreseeable future. The increased documentation of everyday life, by both celebrities and non-celebrities, will inevitably lead to perceived violations of norms and subsequent shaming of the individuals. We have seen examples of the unforgiving nature of the Internet, with past comments resurfacing from the depths of forgotten accounts and the publication of reputation damming videos unbeknownst to the individuals being taped. It is becoming increasingly more challenging to draw a line between what is considered indisputably heinous and what should be regarded as minor transgressions taken out of context. Public shaming has regained its status as an accepted form of social coercion, both against entities and individuals, with protest occurring at a larger scale in recent years and public discontent becoming more tangible. We can further expect online

shaming crowds to develop as our social realities change and public demonstrations occur more frequently.

Unfortunately, this study could not obtain a complete picture of the case studies since the media monitoring software at my disposal does not allow for historical analysis of social media data. It would be of great assistance in future studies to gather social media data before the call-out occurs and track online shaming crowds' growth process. The presented multiple case study analysis did not allow for a test of the individual development level; this would have required analyzing individual posts. Further studies should assess the levels of disinhibition and deindividuation of users participating in online shaming by analyzing the language utilized in their call-out posts and monitoring whether users continue posting about the shaming incident after it has lost its spotlight. Future research should also regard the spontaneity, impulsivity, and influence online crowds have over the enforcement of social norms.

Despite these limitations, the amplified claims making theorem developed in this paper provides a novel perspective of analysis for research. As previously stated at the beginning of this paper, there is minimal literature regarding the formation and behavior of crowds in virtual spaces. The amplified claims making theorem described was conceived as a beginning for social researchers to employ in their study of online shaming crowds. Hopefully, further studies will implement this theorem and extend the current knowledge regarding crowd behavior online.

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Appendices

Figure 5: Louis C.K Social Media Infographic

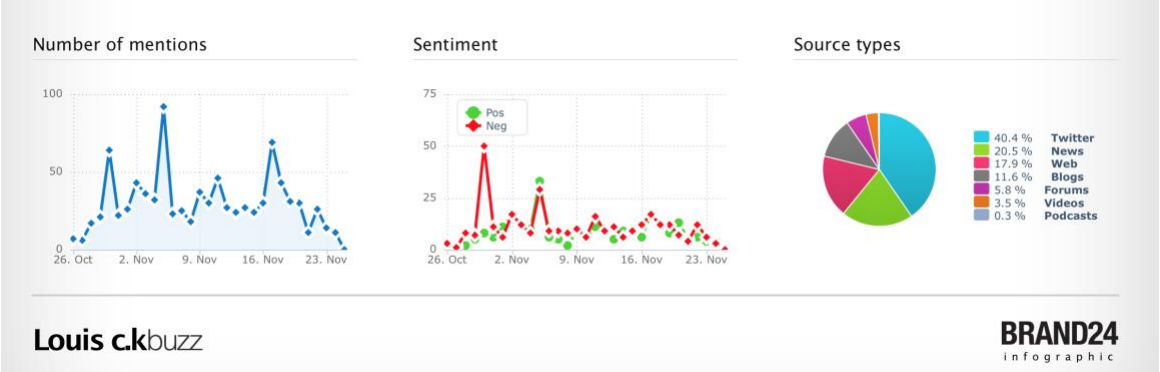
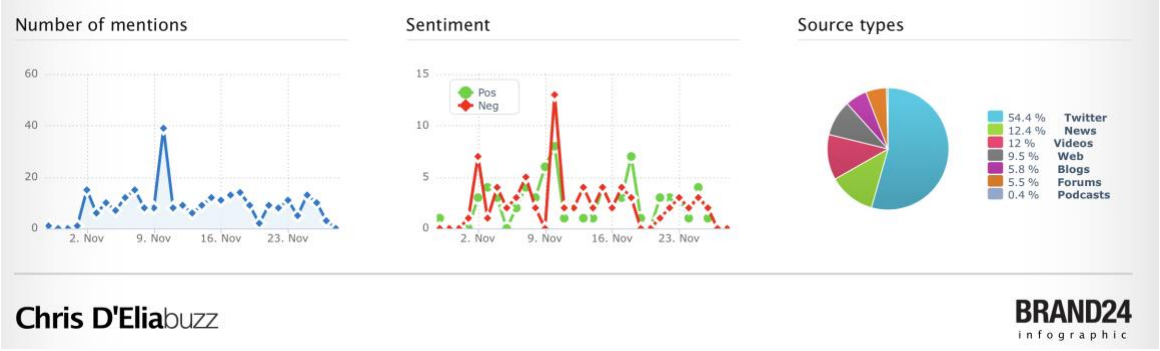
Figure 6: Chris D'Elia Social Media Infographic