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Everyday Racism and «My Tram Experience»: Emotion, Civic Performance and Learning on YouTube

El racismo cotidiano y «Mi experiencia en un tranvía»: emoción, comportamiento cívico y aprendizaje en YouTube

ABSTRACT

Does the public expression and performance of shock, distress, anger, frustration and ideological disapproval of particular sorts of politics constitute a form of collective political expression from which individuals can learn about being citizens? When it comes to the expression of feelings of racial and other types of prejudice, has political correctness led to a deepening of entrenched racist beliefs with no channel for discussion? This article engages with such questions through a case study of YouTube responses to «My Tram Experience» a commuter-uploaded mobile-phone video of a racist diatribe on a tram in the UK. Using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, it describes how these performed, networked and distributed moments of citizen angst demonstrate a limited but interesting range of civic engagements with and positionings towards racism, immigration, class and nationalism. For one reason or another these are not allowed to occur in other public for a such as the mainstream media or schools. The article argues that these vlogs are both a wide-ranging potentially therapeutic resource for those needing validation for their racist or anti-racist views, or for those who wish to express and garner solidarity for discomfort and pain caused by racism; they are also a significant though currently uncurated resource for citizenship education both formal and informal because of their engagements with technology, social context, emotional context and political rhetoric.

RESUMEN

¿La manifestación pública de sentimientos de conmoción, angustia, ira, frustración y desaprobación ideológica de ciertos tipos de hacer política constituyen una forma de expresión colectiva que permiten a las personas aprender a ser ciudadanos? En expresiones de prejuicios raciales u otros, ¿es posible que la «corrección política» haya llevado a una profundización de creencias racistas arraigadas? Este artículo interpela estos interrogantes a tfravés de las respuestas en YouTube al vídeo «Mi experiencia en un tranvía», realizado por un viajero con teléfono móvil a partir de una diatriba racista ocurrida en un tranvía del Reino Unido. Tras un análisis cuantitativo de contenido y un análisis temático, se describe cómo momentos de angustia ciudadana –compartidos y distribuidos por la Red– demuestran un rango limitado y a la vez interesante de relaciones cívicas, así como posicionamientos ante el racismo, la inmigración, la clase social y el nacionalismo. Por diferentes motivos, estos posicionamientos no están presentes en otgros foros públicos como los medios y las escuelas. Se argumenta que estos videoblogs son un recurso terapéutico para aquellos que necesitan el reconocimiento de sus puntos de vista racistas o anti-racistas, o para aquellos que desean expresar o provocar solidaridad en momentos incómodos y dolorosos causados por el racismo. Además son un recurso significativo, aunque todavía no considerado, en la educación para la ciudadanía, tanto la formal como la informal, debido a sus compromisos con la tecnología, el contexto social, el contexto emocional y la retórica política.

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

YouTube, civic learning, racism, emotion, vlogs, learning, politic, engagement.
YouTube, educación cívica, racismo, emoción, videoblogs, aprendizaje, política, compromiso.

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1. Introduction

Is a discussion still rational if it is articulated in explicitly emotional or creative ways? Does the public expression and performance of shock, distress, anger, frustration and ideological disapproval of particular sorts of politics constitute a form of collective political expression from which individuals can learn about being citizens? When it comes to the expression of feelings of racial and other types of prejudice, is it a case of «better out than in» – or the more open debate the healthier the society? On the 28th November 2011 a commuter on a tram in the London borough of Croydon in the UK filmed a young, Caucasian mother, with a child on her lap, having a seemingly unprovoked xenophobic and racist rant against her fellow passengers. These fellow passengers included people of all races, some of whom moved away and others who ultimately began to challenge the «ranter». The mobile-phone video clip of the incident was uploaded onto YouTube and went viral in the course of the next 24 hours. Over the following days and months, it attracted a not unprecedented[1] but nevertheless striking series of mediated responses from YouTubers and those new to YouTube. It was also picked up by local, international or national radio, newspapers and television. It was highlighted as an example of often silently experienced racial tension and social malaise before being dropped. Subsequently, other first-person accounts of racism began to emerge[2]. On YouTube the incident was extensively and fiercely considered in relation to themes such as racism, bad parenting, class, transport rage, xenophobia, multiculturalism in the UK, nationalism, fascism, immigration, the «aptness» of racism as a response to immigration, humanity and social cohesion. Participants in these responses included both naive and considered anti-racist and white supremacist organisations and individuals: some evinced logically articulated and precise political opinions and social agendas; others expressed themselves via references to feelings of confusion, anger and shock against or solidarity with the racist woman in the original video. Many of the responses also formed the basis for further video «rants» and comments.

These performed, networked and distributed moments of citizen angst throw up the key research questions that motivate this study: First, what forms of civic learning, if any, are embodied by YouTube commentaries, vlogs, skits, satirical cartoons and other user generated responses to the phone-uploaded racist encounter «my tram experience»? And second, to what extent can we conceptualise these mediated products as emotional or even as embodying cathartic resources and repertoires for understanding and making sense of politically charged situations in everyday life? While such civic-oriented YouTube content generated by an external event/phenomenon has previously been approached in interesting ways, these will only be outlined in the discussion which follows. I proceed now to a laying out of the methods and findings of this study so as to enable a «first view» of the data, unencumbered by conceptual expectations.

2. Methods and sample

In previous studies, content analysis, network analysis and discourse analysis have shown themselves popular for researching the implications of YouTube for civic participation and the qualities of civic participation therein (Chu, 2009; Van Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2011). This study uses a range of textual analytic methods to answer the research questions discussed above. Thus, in succession, qualitative open coding of just over 200 vlogs, skits, and clips was undertaken. This was carried out independently by four coders on the first 200 uploaded videos (out of more than 800 available) in a search on YouTube of the term «My tram experience» in February and March 2012 and in May 2012. The following features were noted: content, theme and topic; key linguistic phrases; political or social attitudes; relationship to other uploads – direct or indirect references/debate/abuse; genre; age, ethnicity or race of ranter/YouTuber; the balance of «emotional opinion» and «rational argument»; length of segment and whether the YouTuber was a newbie or an experienced community member. The survey spreadsheets and the urls of the videos showed that at least two coders had examined 188 overlapping uploads ranging from the shortest of 08 seconds to the longest of 14 minutes and 09 seconds. Three coders overlapped in coding 169 uploads and all four coders analysed 146 overlapping uploads. There was a high degree of agreement (9.5 out of 10 cases were noted in the same way) with the categorisations of genre, tone, content, politics and affect; only in the exact noting of «key linguistic cues and phrases» was there a greater range of notations. Given our differing intellectual and national backgrounds, this signalled only that coders gave slightly different emphases to particular discursive phrases in relation to race, ethnicity and nationalism.

Following this broader qualitative survey of the material which looked for patterns and gaps or absences in the performance of citizenship and the expression of social outrage/solidarity in relation to the «tram experience», 10 videos were selected for in-depth tex-

tual analysis. Alongside semiotic analysis looking at linguistic and visual cues of comfort and discomfort, civic experience and inexperience, a thematic analysis examining the tensions between apparently factual statements and apparently emotional assertions about «self» and «other» in these videos was undertaken. The ways in which people referred to themselves and their racial or ethnic identity, to civic allegiance and the purpose of their vlog are also the particular foci of this analysis. The results of both content and thematic analyses are presented in the following section.

3. Results

3.1. Broad qualitative content analysis

Videos posted ranged from stand-up comedy and cartoons through social commentary, reasoned argument, political lament and satire to angry diatribe and distressed confessional. «Vlogs» are the prevalent generic mode used across the sample. 163 out of 188 videos (approximately 80%) belong to this genre, with the YouTuber or videomaker talking directly to the camera about «my tram experience». In addition, there are 12 animations (where a voice-over references the incident but the animation is gleaned from popular culture), 5 videos in the style of stand up comedy, 3 videos in the style of news segments and 4 skits re-enacting the incident in humorous or satirical ways. The remainder are a miscellaneous selection of film trailers, political propaganda or rap music.

> What forms of civic learning, if any, are embodied by YouTube commentaries, vlogs, skits, satirical cartoons and other user generated responses to the phone-uploaded racist encounter «my tram experience»? And second, to what extent can we conceptualise these mediated products as emotional or even as embodying cathartic resources and repertoires for understanding and making sense of politically charged situations in everyday life?

More than 70% of the vlogs adopt an intimate discussion or confessional format, addressing the audience directly from behind (or at an angle to) the camera in a car, an outdoor landscape or the interior of room. Vloggers make eye-contact frequently. They create a sense of dialogue through the use of the pronoun «you» or phrases such as «now, you might say»; in other cases, the perpetrator of the racist diatribe is drawn into a debate. Around 18% of the vlogs use re-edited footage of the incident, overlaying this with dialogue and/or interspersing it with other visual footage. Only 2% (5 videos) feature group discussions of the tram incident. Finally there are a few blank screens in which there is evidence of some struggle with technology, and an overriding wish to communicate regardless. In the more detailed descriptions of 10 videos (below), an attempt is made to outline the ways in which this desire to communicate intersects with technological ability and normative discourses on citizenship, race, racism and immigration.

Moving to the question of the links between overtly emotional and rational points of view on the «tram experience», 96 of the videos –just over 50%– are explicitly mixtures of emotional (angry, distressed, shocked, frightened, disgusted) and reasoned (evidence-based, logical, precise, avoiding references to emotion) reactions to the incident. A further 40 present themselves as entirely rational, avoiding discussion of sentiment or personal emotion. 16 satirise the incident from both racist and anti-racist points of view and a further 16 use edited footage or montage to draw attention to the surreal or socially repulsive aspects of the incident. Only 14 videos were categorised by all four coders as exploring with complete seriousness 'emotional response' and overtly uninterested in reasoned political intervention.

Examples of vlog comments suggest the varieties of rational intervention that might be made. All relate to feelings of anger based on opinions about the connections between global political actions and discourses on race or imperialism and local responses to interpersonal racism:

– Poster B: (20-something, British-Asian man) «I've worked all my life in this country. I've given everything for this country», «I'm proud to be a British Asian in Britain», «What else do you want us to do?», «What are we going to do to be accepted in this country?».

– Poster M: (20-something, Caribbean-British man): «the British were the first to go to Africa and rob and steal», «if they are to be asked to pay back now, they would not even afford to pay back», «I think her kid was the shield... people could not really kick her ass because she was holding this kid», «the reason we're in Libya is because of oil – everybody knows it».

– Poster T: (White, middle-aged, gay British woman): «I understand why she's frustrated, but... she's got it completely wrong», «Only people who live on proper council estates... refer to England as «my Britain», «the white people in Britain didn't want to do the shit jobs back then...», «This is a Christian country... you don't come... and demand [Sharia] law».

– Poster R: (20-something Arabic-British woman): «In every country, in every place, you're going to find really stupid, ignorant, racist people. But that shouldn't really shake your faith in the good of... every single person in the world».

Thematically, the majority of the vlogs stress the idea that the young Caucasian woman protagonist of «my tram experience», is in the wrong, either for being racist, for making hate speeches in public or for swearing in front of children. There are, however, exceptions to the disapproval. Nine videos express wholehearted, partial or covert support for Emma West's xenophobia; a further two express support for her views and beliefs but not for her public tirade. For example:

– Poster L: (Teenage/20-something White US woman): «She has every right as white woman to be dissatisfied with the massive amount of non-white immigration to her formerly white homeland of Britain», «And whites don't like non-white immigration for this reason – because of the crime that accompanies non-white immigration», «I don't understand why whites don't have any right to object to their homeland being flooded by non-whites... they are not allowed to be angry... because if they do, they're racist».

Through these comments it is possible to gain some insight into how comments delineate particular political orientations towards race, multicultural society and citizenship. However, a sense of the roles that making and uploading the vlogs play in individual poster's lives and civic identities will be easier to identify in the following section, which moves to more holistic descriptions of the vlog material.

> the idea that top-down political correctness might be driving the most aggressive racist sentiments underground so that they remain resilient but surface only in private moments between friends and family or erupt through public ones like the one captured in «My tram experience». So, the kind of learning that can be seen taking place repeatedly in the performances of shock, annoyance, disgust, ethnic supremacism, anti-racism, apology and humour within the sample is very specific: it is learning about what people may «actually» think beneath the surface of 21st century democratic public speech.

3.2. Textual analysis: the semiotics of civic comment

The original tram incident[3], was filmed contingently by commuters and hence cannot be subjected to the same kind of considered thematic analysis as the responses. However, examining both denotative and connotative aspects of the selection of the responses throws up interesting issues for discussion. Video 1[4], which is approximately 3 minutes long, contains a young Caucasian YouTube. The positioning of the camera in a corner of a room with a used drinking glass on a table and a poster on the wall connote comfortable routines. He is experienced at vlogging and does not bother with formal language, addressing the racist woman on the tram as «possibly the scummiest person I've ever seen». He speaks both to «us» the public and also to her, the perpetrator, directly – «you are...» «you would have...» 174,947 views indicate that others are indeed ready to watch and respond, though comments such as the following also suggest caution about the complicated positions viewers might take up in response to his sim-

ple «racism-is-wrong» stance: «What she said was racist but at least she had the courage to voice her concerns about her culture, she just went about it the wrong way, swearing in front of her boy and insulting people. And anyway she was the «minority» on this tram, in her own country. The left and right should stick together to save our culture and do so in a civilized peaceful way with respect for other cultures».

In contrast, video 2[5] (which has now been placed on a private setting following nasty comments about it) features a young black British woman showing distress and annoyance at the racism of the white woman on the tram – but asserts she is «obviously mentally ill...» thus stereotyping another group of people and exhibiting a prejudice about mental illness. This prejudice – the idea that racism is a mental illness and that no one «sane» or «in their right mind» could be racist – permeates at least a fifth of the posts and vlogs on this issue. This poster comments on media representations of race as a problem in misrepresenting the black community, providing some evidence for her sentiments; however, she then goes on to make assertive comments about «[w]hat white people want to see...», reframing the debate in terms of further essential racial audience traits. Her facial expressions, frowns and movements are all indicative of her dialogue with the public she imagines, and suggest her attempts to connect with them as citizens.

In video 3, which has now been removed from YouTube by the user following British far right flaming, a Caucasian teenager vlogs from his bedroom – «I would have gone straight round and...», while making a strangling motion with his hands. He adds: «but I'd have probably gone to jail for that» and «Let me tell you my thoughts on racism...». He invokes a series of arguments against racism and discrimination, remains relaxed, looks directly at the camera and seems both practiced at making arguments and comfortable with the technology. Like some of the flames posted in response to video 3, video 4[6] is a 20 second film-clip of a British flag with subtitles announcing: «Emma West Heroine of Free Speech». It has a British far right ethos in terms of aesthetics and content, including subtitles about «White power/white genocide». The poster comments extensively below his video: «We need to understand that this poor woman had no idea what she was getting into. She snapped in a moment of rage. She was obviously provoked. Instead of criticizing her, you anti-whites should feel deeply sorry for her. She's being deprived of her freedom & her family, just before Christmas [...]. She will be made an example of, in order to terrorize other Whites into shutting their mouths & tolerating the destruction of their race & country. What she needs is for fellow Whites to come to her aid & support her by 'John Whitee'».

These comments draw on assertive racist discourses that will be familiar to those reading discussions of Anders Breivik and his views. They are also reminiscent of the postings of far right Hindutva groups in India (Banaji, 2008).

In video 5[7], a greenhaired girl with a US accent, looking to be in her late teens, responds adopting a precise, descriptive, pedagogic tone. Initially her talk seems addressed to a group of imagined youth like herself living in the US. Her voice is gentle rather than fierce at first and she calls on humanist and egalitarian discourses about race equality and «colour-blindness». She thanks commuters in the video who stood up against racism. The last minute of the 3 minutes is the most uncontrolled. Here she expresses overt anger towards the racist woman, wishing that «someone would kick her in the face» or «take the tampon out of her ass» because «I hate racists».

The movement from subdued discussion to aggressive disgust at the racist is mirrored in dozens of the videos on this topic by women posters, testifying to the fact that expressing anger at perceived injustice is an equally if not more satisfying form of participation than debate. If the preceding vlogs and clips all centred on the feelings of the posters, video 6[8] breaks this mould. Here a young Caucasian university student in the UK analyses the position of the racist ranter on the tram as well as other arguments used against anti-racist posters. He calls on explicitly scientific and rational arguments from Darwinian evolution to postcolonial history and sociology of the inner city asserting that «[i]t's not because they're black that they're committing crimes...».

He suggests instead that «[w]e all come from Africans» and deals with the race/crime accusations he has heard in other vlogs, signalling wider YouTube postings on this topic as the arena of debate. The pace is rapid, and though the interior is a bedroom, he makes a series of professional edits in the video to make his points more succinct. The style is overtly pedagogic, with nuanced corrections to possible perceived bias. This poster also says explicitly that he does not consider himself a «vlogger» but has been drawn to the medium because of the topic and situation.

Returning us once more to the overt emotion of the previous posters, video 7[9] shows a Caucasian woman/teenager saying «I just watched it and quite

frankly I feel physically sick». This vlog is also shot in a bedroom with a large Barbie poster on the wall in the frame. The speaker is comfortable with the technology, evidently wanting to convey her hope that people «don't think that all white British people are like that». Her motivation is to refute racism and to show her shame, but she notes that making the video has made her «feel a little bit better». She also addresses those who support the racist woman through their videos and concludes with a series of «Fuck you» statements to the racist commuter. In response, there are many racist flames and comments under this vlog.

Video 8[10] is an animated version from a children's cartoon series «Thomas the Tank Engine» with the racist's voiceover and other passengers spoken by train cartoons. Nothing happens in the video apart from the trains talking animatedly to each other, and the whole thing appears spoof-like until the point emerges: the actual racist diatribe took place in front of young children. It was on a tram. It was real life. And a small frisson of recognition might hit a viewer who stuck with the clip to the end.

Video 9[11] depicts a black screen, with an anti-racist commentary by a woman who sounds young and claims to be English and white talking about government and mainstream media which, she asserts, make people racist. This poster is possibly not proficient with technology, as sounds of a struggle and the blank screen testify. She tells people to «think for themselves» about why anyone would come to the country to live on «123 pounds-per-week of benefit which are barely enough to keep body and soul together».

Video 10[12] depicts a modest, explicitly anti-racist Australian man from Perth talking about the «undercurrent» of racism which is more dangerous than open debate – «the underlying danger of unspoken views». He positions himself in his garden, a calm outdoors setting with birds chirping, and a dog barks several times. The intellectual content of this video goes beyond either immediate agreements with anti-immigration policy or refutations of racism to make a philosophical argument about the expression of negative and racist feelings in society, political correctness and the dangers of self-censorship. He references a range of events and issues including the mainstream media's representation of the London riots of 2011, calling unspoken racism «an undercurrent of a core feeling towards other human beings, more destructive than the overt racism of the BNP».

His message might be seen as a reframing of the injunction: «better out than in» in relation to the repression of racist views – who knows how they transmute or grow when they are not in the public sphere?

4. Theorising YouTube citizenship: Discussion, performance, deliberation, action?

The most popular conceptual approach for communications scholars to the online video-sharing platform YouTube and citizenship has been via the question of whether new digital technologies, and the internet in particular, are enabling an ideal transnational public sphere (Turnšek-Hančič, 2008), new public sphere (Papacharissi, 2004) or «vlogosphere» (Griffith & Papacharissi, 2010). Habermas-inspired discussions of a public sphere defined by the presence of «rational deliberation» and Chantal Mouffe's nuanced elaboration of «pluralist agonism» have proved fruitful springboards for a number of such discussions. Van Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj, for instance, have addressed the significance of YouTube for public sphere theories in several papers. Using a custom-made cybermetric network analysis tool to measure the interactions between posters, they discuss the online video battle arising from Geert Wilder's viciously Islamophobic film «Fitna». Their primary question is «whether, how and why online reactions and interactions contribute to rational deliberation or agonistic pluralism» (Van-Zoonen, Vis & Mihelj, 2011: 5). They conclude that «only 13 percent or fewer of the posters interacted with each other through comments, subscriptions or friendship»... YouTube enabled a multiplication of views rather than an exchange or dialogue between them [2011: 1, emphasis added]. Examining the «performance» of citizenship evinced in the styles of different types of online discursive intervention (2010) the same authors conclude that «a desire to make a connection to dispersed others is... what binds both the occasional acts and embedded practices of political and religious performance in reaction to Fitna on YouTube» (2010, 260).

They further argue that «these attempts are molded in cognitive, emotional, humorous, denigrating, amiable, absurdist and other ways, but that none of them were violent or aggressive» (Ibid), unusual in the context of a tool and medium where self-expression is also associated with aggressive flamers and trolls (Lange 2007, Burgess & Green, 2008). Elsewhere, Vis, Van-Zoonen and Mihelj (2011) call on Isin and Neilsen's conceptualisation of civic identity as elaborated through «acts of citizenship». This conceptualisation has the advantage of freeing individuals in society from some of the more tenuous normative assumptions tied to the idea of being a citizen. Here citizenship is not

conceived as a series of competencies or «rights and responsibilities». Instead, it allows an evaluation and critique of single interventions by individuals in political or civic life – something particularly suited to the interrupted, intermittent nature of clusters of online interventions. So, how might such «acts» of networked video citizenship be further theorised?

Dervin uses linguistic discourse analysis to examine attitudes to multiculturalism expressed by online racist rants. He is interested in two sets of questions, one around the ways in which multiculturalism is perceived and misconceptualised and another around the types of people and institutions intervening in the my tram experience debate to defend or critique racism (2012: 179-180). Based on written comments left below the videos, he suggests that we should «retain five types of comments: racist, anti-racist, (neo-) colonizing, comments about language and meta-analysis of the rants» (2012: 187). These kinds of categorisations offer codes which can be used in either quantitative or qualitative studies. Theorising the comments, Dervin maintains that «[b]oundaries and borders between the ranters and their victims rely on such aspects as nationality origins and language» (2012: 190). Nevertheless, linguistic analysis is methodologically limited because it does not address aspects of the videos such as the commitment to a particular political stance, emotional engagement embodied in voice modulation and iconography, or the civic and affective aspects of revealing or performing racism or anti-racism in front of a camera as a person with a particular accent and skin colour. Dealing with precisely such an inadequacy of traditional linguistic-oriented discourse analysis for YouTube, Elizabetta Adami (2009) argues that «[a]t a theoretical and methodological level... video-interaction works on the participants» interest-driven exploitation of the prompts offered by the initial video» [p395, emphasis added]. She maintains that «this makes... the heuristic notion of an interest-driven prompt-response relation [seem] more appropriate for accounting for sign-making patterns in video-interaction» (2009: 395). This is precisely the method with which the coders in this paper have engaged[13].

Having described both the broader trends and the details of a number of the videos about «My tram experience» (see table, next page) in the previous section and looked across other studies examining YouTube citizenship, it becomes apparent that learning of many different types is occurring across the field of videos. First, there are ways in which YouTubers are thinking through acceptable and unacceptable modes of speech and expression in what sometimes is and sometimes clearly is not a public sphere of the sort envisaged by Habermas, Frazer and Mouffe. This includes knowledge of the technology, the framing of rooms and spaces, the modulations of voice and rhetoric, the controlled or uncontrolled expression of negative emotion, as well as the angling of cameras to include other symbols such as posters, flags, piercings, hair, hand movements and close-ups. The fact that at least a fifth of the videos with uninhibited exhibitions of anger, passion, dislike or hatred have now – five months later– been taken down or placed on private settings suggests that the experience of privateness and publicness in political debate is also a negotiated learning process. Second, people posting on this topic seem to be «learning through doing». While examples of rhetorically accomplished anti-racist and pro-migrant positions emerge, the majority build arguments as they go along, thinking about what counts as evidence in favour of mixed-race societies or against immigration, thinking about causes and social context and trying to address imagined questioners while the camera records. Thus, although it is tempting to go along with the idea that the videos examined here display a multiplication of views rather than a dialogue between views, this study suggests that civic debate is taking place, though it is happening between a limited series of positions. However, what we can name dialogue needs to be conceptualised as embodied not

It is possible to assert that taken together the video responses to «My tram experience» are a rich but as yet uncurated resource for civic learning and an elaborate, potentially therapeutic resource for coping with stressful social interactions around race. Apparently, many people make the videos and post them online simply in order to «feel better».

necessarily by direct responses of one poster to another on YouTube –although these do exist– but as happening between different ideological camps or series of ideas about race, citizenship, migration, racial mixing, crime, racism, ethnicity, nationalism, parenting, mental health, class and education level. In about a third of the videos, patterns of racism stemming from the mainstream media, government policies, laws and schooling are connected to the diatribe witnessed and blame is displaced from the individual woman to the type of society which produced her. When this happens, the comments on the videos become even more vitriolic, suggesting that entrenched positions are indeed challenged by such clear public discussion as they would be in a newspaper editorial or documentary.

Finally, and most substantively, this study opens up the issue expressed by the YouTuber in video 10: the idea that top-down political correctness might be driving the most aggressive racist sentiments underground so that they remain resilient but surface only in private moments between friends and family or erupt through public ones like the one captured in «My tram experience». So, the kind of learning that can be seen taking place repeatedly in the performances of shock, annoyance, disgust, ethnic supremacism, anti-racism, apology and humour within the sample is very specific: it is learning about what people may «actually» think beneath the surface of 21st century democratic public speech. It is also a type of learning about how citizens cope with being the «other» of such speech –dozens of non-white posters recount private traumatic experiences of racism till now undisclosed– and how one copes with «becoming the other» through association with ideas that are no longer acceptable to express. The majority of white YouTubers posting on the topic want to emphasise that they are not like the racist ranter on the tram, that they do not share such views. Some do this by talking about the physical disgust she makes them feel, and their wish to beat her up, kick or punish her for spewing forth hate speech. Others do it by denigrating her class or educational level, doubting her sobriety and often her sanity. The vlogs supporting the racist rant and its context explicitly try to «educate» viewers about the «danger» in which «white British» people find themselves.

Arising from these three interrelated types of learning –about oneself, about a specific topic/event and about the social world– it is possible to assert that taken together the video responses to «My tram experience» are a rich but as yet uncurated resource for civic learning and an elaborate, potentially therapeutic resource for coping with stressful social interactions around race. Apparently, many people make the videos and post them online simply in order to «feel better». In fact, they assert that they do feel better –less upset, less alone– having shared their views. When the comments posted on their vlogs become too hurtful, they retract and feel worse, often making a decision to close comment functions or make videos private. It is possible, then, to find tensions across the sample. These exist both between a variety of emotions linked to a range of rational stances about politics, the self and society and between potentially persuasive and therapeutic intentions.

Where civic persuasion is the goal of a video, efforts are made to present coherent arguments in logical sequences, to build evidence while avoiding sentiment and to come to a calm, rational conclusion. However, the fact that all this is spurred by an uncontrolled racist outburst on public transport, and that arguments ostensibly against racism and xenophobia often also betray prejudices about class or mental health or contain reverse racism or negative feelings towards particular religious groups testifies to the significant and motivating affective undertow to most civic and political discussion on or offline.

	Age, race, nationality, gender of poster and	Experience of poster on YouTube	Type of Post
1	Young Caucasian male	Experienced	Racism is wrong, vlog
2	Young black British woman	Newbie	Distress, anger, vlog
3	Caucasian teenager, male	Experienced	Anger, anti-racist vlog
4	Older, male, British, Caucasian	Experienced	Far right racist film clip
5	Young, Caucasian female, US	Newbie	Comment, anti-racist vlog
6	Young, male, Caucasian university student, UK	Newbie	Political debate, vlog
7	Caucasian female teenager, UK	Experienced	Anti-racist rant, vlog
8	Unknown	Unknown	Satire, filmclip with voice over
9	Caucasian female, young, UK	Newbie	Political comment, blank screen only voice
10	Caucasian, male, early-thirties, Australia	Experienced	Considered discussion on causes and effects of racist belief, vlog

Table of information on the ten clips subjected to qualitative analysis.

Notes

[1] Other experiences of passenger abusiveness or rage on public transport have had even greater numbers of viewers and responses – for instance the Singaporean «bus uncle» incident from 2006 discussed by Donna Chu (2009).

[2] www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2067692/Racist-train-rant-The-thugs-threatened-child.html; www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nabeela-zahir/my-tram-experience-race_b_1119605.html.

[3] www.youtube.com/watch?v=e48_ee-b18I&feature=related .

[4] www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LV5h4F3H4Q&feature=related.

[5] www.youtube.com/watch?v=r18NwDqjRFQ&feature=related.

[6] www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyfDcRtF3ko.

[7] www.youtube.com/watch?v=IITZSLPRZrs&feature=related.

[8] www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEdBBFwYMTY&feature=related.

[9] www.youtube.com/watch?v=Htc2ELQVUWo.

[10] www.youtube.com/watch?v=wumjoTQ13YY.

[11] www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH4ho-3Nomo.

[12] www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3Blna_k3Nw.

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