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Social Network Analysis of YouTube Comments on the Clip 'Louis Theroux: The Settler'

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Abstract
The documentary Louis Theroux: The Settlers (2025) generated significant public discourse following its release, particularly through a viral YouTube clip that gained over 800,000 views and 7,000 comments. This study examines the structure and dynamics of the comment section using Social Network Analysis (SNA) with a descriptive quantitative approach. The dataset consists of 7,448 comments from 5,402 users, forming 3,628 interaction networks. Data were collected via the YouTube API and analyzed using Gephi. Network-level findings show a diameter of 3, indicating efficient interaction paths, but a density of 0.0000, suggesting minimal interconnectedness. A high modularity score (0.814) reveals fragmented discussion clusters. At the actor level, @jessehash1583 was the most active commenter, while @edwardhomson6005 emerged as the most influential based on engagement metrics. Meanwhile, @Oml708t had the highest betweenness centrality, acting as a bridge between users. Overall, user participation was largely expressive and fragmented, with limited sustained dialogue. This study highlights patterns of digital communication and the role of key actors in shaping discourse on controversial socio-political issues.

Keywords*: Louis Theroux, YouTube comments, Social Network Analysis*

Paper Type: *Research paper*

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INTRODUCTION

First announced on February 10, 2025, through a news article on BBC (2025), 'Louis Theroux: The Settlers' is a documentary by British-American journalist Louis Theroux. When the film was finally released on April 27, 2025, the perspective he took as a director and his framing of Israeli citizens in the film sparked online debate regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Theroux mentions in the article he wrote for The Guardian (2025). One particular clip that reflects this portrayal was uploaded to Louis Theroux's official YouTube channel, titled: 'That seems sociopathic. | Louis Theroux: The Settlers'. The title refers to Theroux's statement, "that seems sociopathic," which he directed at Daniela Weiss, a prominent female Picture in the settler movement often referred to as the "godmother of the settler movement". As of June 2025, the video had been viewed over 800,000 times and received more than 7,000 comments.

Previous research has explored YouTube comment sections as a means to analyze users' attitudes and opinions (Alhujaili and Yafooz 2021), assess the potential impact that these comments may have on viewers' perceptions and behaviors (e.g., Möller et al. 2021; Walther et al. 2010), and investigate how audiences engage in discourse around particular topics (e.g., Schneider 2016). These discussions can range from simple expressions of agreement or disagreement to complex debates involving moral, political, or ideological arguments (Ben-David and Soffer 2019). The comment section, therefore, functions not merely as a feedback tool but as a participatory forum where diverse perspectives converge and contest meaning. Within this discursive space, users engage in practices such as quoting each other's comments, referencing external sources (Striewski et al. 2022), or employing humor (Schneebeli 2020) and sarcasm (Al-Hammad et al. 2024) to assert their stance, all of which contribute to shaping the tone and direction of the conversation. As a result, the YouTube comment section operates as a microcosm of digital discourse, where social interaction, identity performance, and ideological negotiation unfold in real time, creating an evolving social network of communication (Tussa'diah and Kartika 2023).

While previous Social Network Analysis (SNA) studies have explored political discourse on other platforms (Gruzd et al. 2022; Buzelin et al. 2025; Beers et al. 2023; Hofmann et al. 2022; Utami et al. 2021), there remains a gap in understanding how highly sensitive and polarizing broadcast content, such as this documentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, shapes fragmented network structures on YouTube. Unlike text-heavy platforms that often facilitate sustained,

dialogical debate, the unique environment of YouTube comments often leans toward expressive, one-way reactions (Tur-Viñes and González-Río 2021). Therefore, this study applies the SNA framework to specifically investigate the structure and dynamics of this highly polarized comment section, identifying the key actors who connect these otherwise isolated discussions and contributing new insights into public communication behavior in digital environments.

In communication studies, the spread of information on social media platforms like YouTube is closely linked to communication networks. Social Network Analysis (SNA) enables researchers to identify key actors, interaction patterns, and the direction and intensity of information dissemination in digital networks (Thakur 2023). By quantifying and visualizing relational structures, SNA enables researchers to detect clusters, bridging actors, and opinion leaders who play crucial roles in either facilitating or constraining communication flow (Farooq et al. 2025). In the context of the comment section under the clip of Louis Theroux: The Settlers, this approach allows for both structural measurement and theoretical interpretation.

Similar approaches have been used in previous communication network studies to explore how information spreads in digital spaces. For example, Reselina and Astuti (2024) found that the comment network of the first 2024 presidential debate video on YouTube formed a one-mode network, with key actors having high centrality and playing significant roles in shaping public opinion and campaign discourse. Arifin et al. (2024) showed that even though the Byon Combat Vol. 3 YouTube community formed a relatively large communication network, it featured few direct connections, had only a few bridging actors, and demonstrated low reciprocity (8%), indicating limited influence within the network. Similarly, Purwandari et al. (2024) concluded that YouTube comment sections have the potential to offer insights into predicting future elections through sentiment and network analysis.

This study also incorporates the Communication Network Theory (Rogers and Kincaid 1981) as its theoretical foundation. According to this theory, communication is conceptualized not as linear transmission of messages but as a process of mutual understanding and convergence among individuals within a network. This theory emphasizes that communication occurs through interactive linkages, where information, attitude, and behaviors are continuously exchanged and reshaped through social relationships (Monge and Contractor 2003). Within this model, each

individual (or "actor") in the network contributes to the formation of shared meaning through reciprocal interactions, resulting in patterns of influence, diffusion, and feedback that define the overall structure of communication.

Applying this theory to the YouTube comment network means understanding users not simply as message senders and receivers, but as interconnected participants engaged in a collective meaning-making process (Rotman et al. 2009). Replies, mentions, or likes in YouTube comments all constitute relational ties that reveal how opinions are disseminated, reinforced, or contested in public discussions of sensitive political issues (Röchert et al. 2020). The Communication Network Theory provides the conceptual grounding for identifying network characteristics such as centralization, density, and reciprocity as indicators of how effectively information and opinions circulate within a digital public sphere.

These studies offer valuable insights into the processes of information dissemination and the development of more effective communication strategies, particularly in the realm of social media. In this study, network analysis is applied to the comments under the clip of *Louis Theroux: The Settlers* to identify which users actively engage in spreading information and shaping public opinion. Hence, social network analysis of YouTube comment sections becomes a relevant and significant tool to understand and map communication dynamics within the increasingly complex digital landscape.

This research specifically analyzes the communication network within the comment section of the documentary clip "*Louis Theroux: The Settlers"*, focusing on metrics such as diameter, density, reciprocity, centralization, and modularity to identify key actors and interaction patterns within the network. The objective is to analyze how patterns of interaction among YouTube users facilitate or hinder convergence of meaning in discussions surrounding politically and ethically sensitive content. Moreover, this research aims to contribute to the literature on social networks and actor analysis in social media use, especially in the context of public commentary on politically and ethically sensitive documentary content.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach using the Social Network Analysis (SNA) method, which models interactions between actors in a network by representing the data in the form of a graph to identify the influence and relationships among them (Ramadhan 2020). This method was selected to examine communication patterns and interactions formed in the comment section of a YouTube video, with a focus on key actors, actor-to-actor relationships, and the overall structure of the communication network. In SNA, individuals or groups are considered nodes within the network, while their interactions are represented as edges—lines connecting one actor to another (Scott in Raseline and Astuti 2024). This method is widely used to identify influential actors in social networks, particularly on social media, due to its capacity to map the distribution and flow of information within communication systems (Kurniawan et al. as cited in Hidayat et al. 2023).

Through social network analysis, the researcher not only visualizes user relationships but also analyzes them based on quantitative indicators at the actor, group, and system levels (Fitriyah et al. 2020). At the actor level, this study analyzes active actors by measuring degree centrality and betweenness centrality to identify the most influential individuals with strategic positions in the network. At the system level, the analysis includes metrics such as diameter, density, and modularity to assess actor connectivity and patterns of community formation within the network. These indicators are selected based on a framework intended to provide a comprehensive overview of communication dynamics and the strategic roles played by key actors in the network.

The object of analysis in this research is the video titled "That seems sociopathic." | Louis Theroux: The Settlers, uploaded on May 16, 2025, on Louis Theroux's official YouTube channel. The population of this study consists of all comments and replies posted on the video between May 16 and June 14, 2025, totaling 7,448 comments. Data collection was conducted using a web crawling technique via the YouTube Application Programming Interface (API), supported by the web tool labs.polysis.net, which enables systematic and structured data extraction. Primary network analysis was conducted on all comments, and no specific algorithmic filtering for spam or bot accounts was applied.

Ethical considerations were addressed by focusing exclusively on publicly available data accessed through the official YouTube API, ensuring compliance with all platform public data policies. User identification within the analysis was limited to the non-private public handles (e.g., @jessehash1583), thereby anonymizing user identities and preventing the collection or dissemination of any private information.

In this study, each comment is constructed as part of the communication network, where users are treated as nodes and reply interactions are classified as edges (connecting lines), edges (connections) were defined exclusively by reply interactions, and not by likes or other metrics. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with a saturated sampling (census) approach, in which the entire population is treated as the sample due to the manageable total size (Sugiyono in Sari and Ratmono 2021). The data obtained is then analyzed using Gephi, an open-source software specifically designed to analyze and visualize complex social networks. Through Gephi, the communication network can be mapped to reveal actor connectivity patterns and the overall network structure (Reselina and Astuti 2019). The results of the analysis are presented in a clear and interpretable visual form.

This study was conducted through six sequential stages. The first stage, problem identification, was carried out to define the research focus on communication patterns in YouTube comment sections related to socio-political issues. The second stage, data collection, involved web crawling using the YouTube API to retrieve all comments and replies on the target video. The third stage consisted of network modeling using Gephi to visualize user interactions as a graph. The fourth stage involved analyzing network properties through various metrics to identify the structure and the most influential actors. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the visual and quantitative interpretations from the network analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

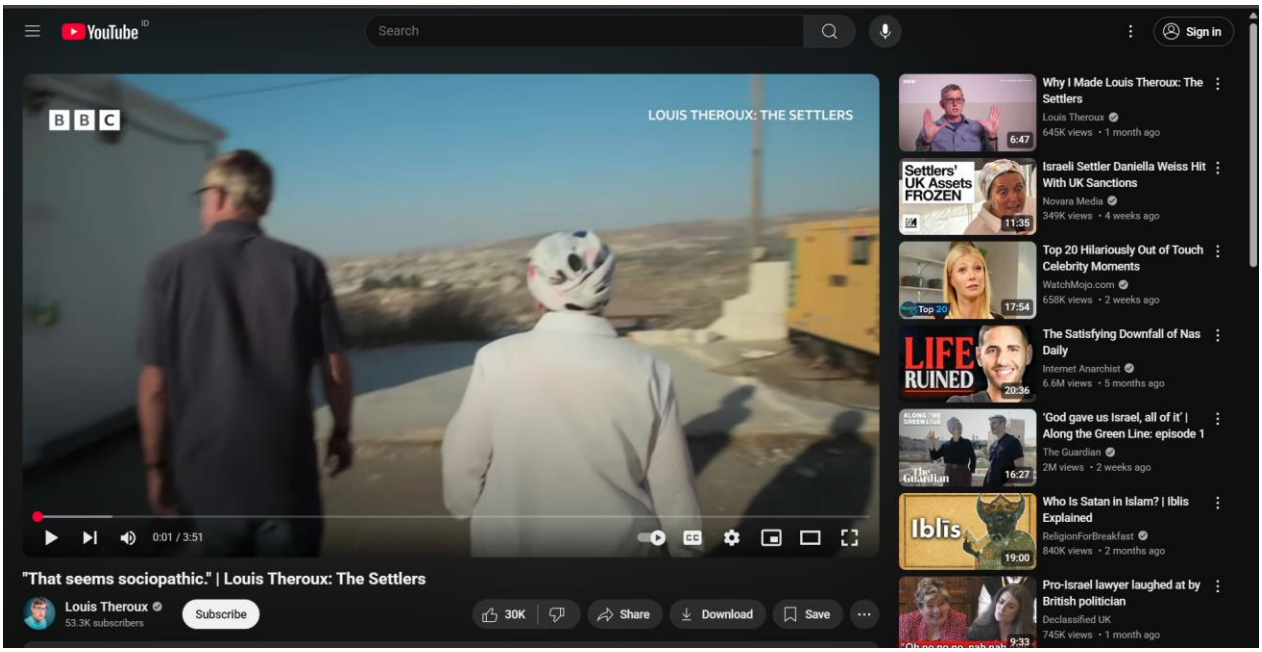
Following observation and analysis of the comment network on the YouTube video titled *"That seems sociopathic."* | *Louis Theroux: The Settlers*, published on May 16, 2025, several findings were identified.

Table 1.

Video ID	lrdldVhfbaU
Channel Name	Louis Theroux
Title	"That seems sociopathic." | Louis Theroux: The Settlers
Upload Date	16 Mei 2025
Views	806,597
Likes	27,289
Comment	7,448
Description	I met the godmother of the settler movement, Daniella Weiss. Watch Louis Theroux: The Settlers on BBC iPlayer https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m002bm1y/louis-theroux-the-settlers

Information on Louis Theroux's YouTube Video

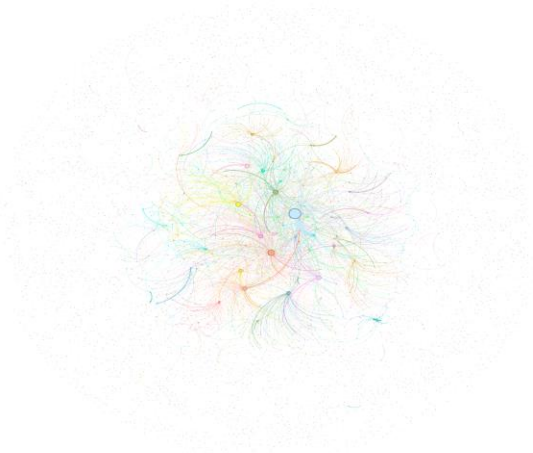
Picture 1.



Screenshot of the YouTube Video

Based on the data collected, there were 7,448 comments involving 5,402 unique actors and 3,628 identified interaction networks.

Picture 2.



Main Network Visualization

Using Gephi software, 3,628 networks were identified in the comment section of the video. Comments that were not part of these networks are considered isolated or stand-alone. Nodes with the same color in the visualization represent actors belonging to the same cluster.

Table 2.

Metric	Value
Diameter	3
Density	0.000
Modularity	0.814

YouTube Comment Network Metrics

In the analysis of the comment network on Louis Theroux's YouTube video examined in this study, three main aspects were analyzed. First is the diameter, which measures the furthest distance between two or more actors in a network. Networks with fewer actors typically have shorter interaction distances, while larger networks tend to have longer interaction distances.

The second aspect analyzed is density, which describes how closely actors in the network are connected to each other. Density is expressed on a scale from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates that all actors are perfectly connected to each other.

And the third and final aspect reviewed is modularity, which indicates the formation of communities or groups within the network. High modularity indicates the presence of many different discussion clusters without being dominated by a single community.

From that description we know that the Diameter value of 3 suggests that, when interaction occurs, it is relatively efficient. However, the Density value of 0.0000 reveals a highly fragmented network structure, where connections between actors are extremely rare. This finding demonstrates that the communication on this highly polarizing content is dispersed and lacks the intense,

reciprocal connectivity required for a sustained, complex public dialogue. Furthermore, the high Modularity score of 0.814 confirms the presence of diverse discussion clusters. This segmentation indicates that the network is not a unified public sphere, but rather a space where users form issue-based social connections within separate groups, allowing different narratives regarding the socio-political conflict to co-exist without reaching central consensus.

Networking Analysis

a. Most Frequent Commenters

Based on the analysis of the comment network on the YouTube video being studied, ten accounts were identified as the most active contributors in the discussion through the comment section. The Top 10 actors with the highest number of comments are as follows:

1. @jessehash1583 (45 komentar)
2. @konzeptzwei305 (36 komentar)
3. @MariakhanKhan-w7k (30 komentar)
4. @Zenithx3 (25 komentar)
5. @LongGoneSoLong (24 komentar)
6. @Squadron_Bodron (22 komentar)
7. @Brittanyjones-sf7rc (18 komentar)
8. @melmelk (17 komentar)
9. @nell6731 (17 komentar)
10. @boofriedmann2980 (16 komentar)

The top position is occupied by @jessehash1583 with 45 comments, followed by @konzeptzwei305 (36) and @MariakhanKhan-w7k (30). The high frequency of comments uploaded indicates that these accounts are highly participative actors in the public discussion

taking place in the comment section. In the context of Social Network Analysis (SNA), they may be considered as comment initiators who potentially play key roles in initiating interactions.

This phenomenon shows that communication activity is not only determined by popularity or received responses but also by the initiative to comment. These actors may have particular motives, such as shaping opinions, influencing the discussion, or simply demonstrating intense presence. However, a high number of comments does not necessarily correlate directly with influence or connectivity in the overall network, hence it needs to be compared with other metrics to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

b. Most Replied-to Actors

Observation of reply patterns revealed ten accounts with the highest number of replies, indicating a high level of engagement in online conversations. The Top 10 actors with the most replies are as follows:

1. @edwardhomson6005 (178)
2. @EdWiley671 (94)
3. @vanessac1965 (74)
4. @villagepatrick6376 (71)
5. @leea1988 (67)
6. @zapfanzapfan (64)
7. @abulkhansaa906 (63)
8. @YourBrotherMo (63)
9. @thescourgeofathousan (53)
10. @salahmagoosh4575 (50)

In this category, the account @edwardhomson6005 ranks highest with 178 replies, followed by @EdWiley671 (94) and @vanessac1965 (74). A high number of replies shows that these actors have a high level of engagement in online conversations. Theoretically, this indicates that they may have posted controversial, engaging, or dialogue-provoking comments.

c. Most Liked Comments

The data processing results reveal ten accounts whose comments received the most likes. The Top 10 actors are as follows:

1. @zapfanzapfan (12802)
2. @edwardhomson6005 (10691)
3. @Asha2820 (6920)
4. @villagepatrick6376 (6757)
5. @YourBrotherMo (6712)
6. @EdWiley671 (5413)
7. @Official_Alphabet_Inc (4646)
8. @salahmagoosh4575 (4338)
9. @abulkhansaa906 (4267)
10. @ShelbyTomov (3615)

In terms of likes, @zapfanzapfan stands out with 12,802, followed by @edwardhomson6005 (10,691) and @Asha2820 (6,920). A high number of likes shows acceptance or agreement from the community regarding the content of the comments made by these actors. In online communication studies, likes are often considered a form of passive support or resonance with the opinion expressed.

When these three metrics are analyzed together, it becomes clear that some actors occupy strategic positions in more than one category. For example, @edwardhomson6005 ranks high both in the most replied-to and most liked categories. This shows that they are not only active in creating interaction but also receive both emotional and rational responses from the community. This reflects a combination of high engagement and social validation—two important aspects in understanding influential actors in online comment networks.

Additionally, actors like @zapfanzapfan also show strong performance in two categories: most replied-to and most liked. Interestingly, however, some highly active commenters such as @jessehash1583 and @konzeptzwei305 do not appear in the other two categories. This indicates that the quantity of comments does not always correspond with the quality or impact of the comments

Degree Centrality

Table 3.

Account	***In-degree***	***Out-degree***	***Degree***
@edwardhomson6005	178	0	178
@EdWiley671	94	1	95
@vanessac1965	74	0	74
@villagepatrick6376	71	0	71
@leea1988	67	0	67

Degree Centrality

Degree Centrality measures how "active" or "popular" a node is in the network by counting the number of direct connections (edges) it has. In the context of the YouTube comment network,

each connection represents an interaction, whether it's a reply, mention, or like between two accounts. The higher the Degree Centrality, the more accounts are directly connected to that node.

The highest-ranked actor is @edwardhomson6005 with a degree of 178, indicating that this actor has the largest number of connections in the comment section of Louis Theroux's video. The next highest is @EdWiley671 with 95, followed by @vanessac1965 with 74, @villagepatrick6376 with 71, and @leea1988 with 67.

This table also shows the in-degree and out-degree for each actor. For instance, @edwardhomson6005 has an in-degree of 178 and an out-degree of 0, which means their comments received many responses, but they didn't respond much in return. Similarly, @EdWiley671 has an in-degree of 94 and out-degree of 1, indicating they receive more responses than they give.

When comparing actor-level metrics, the account @edwardhomson6005 stands out as the most influential and highly validated. With the highest reply count and the second-highest number of likes, coupled with the highest Degree Centrality of 178, this actor functions as an Opinion Leader or Amplifier within the network structure. The high volume of direct responses and support confirms that their comments served as a key reference point in the discussion. This demonstrates that discourse is heavily driven by, and reactive to, the validated statements of a few central Pictures, enhancing message distribution speed across the network.

Degree centrality has significant implications:

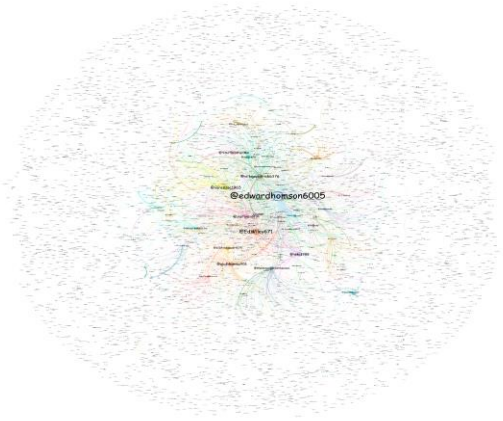
1. Conversation Influencers: nodes with the highest degree often act as key reference points in discussions.

2. Information Spread: The messages or content shared by these actors are more likely to reach a wider audience quickly, enhancing message distribution speed.

3. Moderation Priorities: In community management, high-degree accounts can be targeted for intervention due to their wide-reaching impact on the network.

Thus, degree centrality provides valuable insights into who the key drivers of discussion are, complementing closeness and betweenness metrics for a more comprehensive understanding of the network dynamics.

Picture 3.



Degree Centrality

Betweenness Centrality

Betweenness Centrality measures the extent to which a node acts as a "bridge" connecting other nodes in a network. From the table, @Oml708t has the highest betweenness value, indicating that this actor is often on the path between pairs of other actors. A higher betweenness value suggests that this actor frequently acts as an intermediary in communication or relationships between actors in the network. Next, @thehenchman and @Ayman.Al.Balushi have lower but still significant betweenness values (0.000002), suggesting they also play intermediary roles, although less frequently than @Oml708t.

The analysis of Betweenness Centrality identifies @Oml708t as the actor holding the highest value (0.000005), confirming their strategic role as a Bridge or Liaison. In the context of this highly fragmented network (density 0.0000), this position is vital, as @Oml708t is frequently on the path between otherwise disconnected discussion clusters. This role is significant because it grants the actor control over information flow, allowing them to facilitate communication between

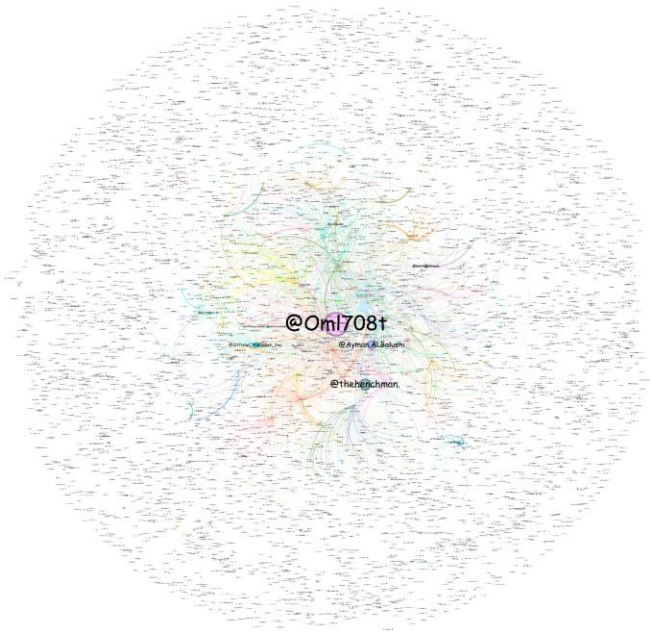
isolated users and potentially shape dominant narratives across the diverse sub-networks of the comment section.

Table 4.

Account	**Betweenness**
@Oml708t	0.000005
@thehenchman.	0.000002
@Ayman.Al.Balushi	0.000002

Betweenness Centrality

Picture 4.



Betweenness Centrality

The visualization in Picture 4 shows the node size of @Oml708t as much larger, with its strategic position in the center of the cluster, emphasizing its role as the main "bridge" between discussion groups. This central role has important implications:

1. Control of Information Flow: Accounts with high Betweenness can either accelerate or slow the spread of certain topics, depending on how their comments or replies are developed.

2. Formation of Dominant Narratives: As @Oml708t is often on the communication path, the opinions it conveys have the potential to shape public opinion in the comment network.

3. Strategic Intervention: Targeting these bridge nodes, for example, through moderation or collaboration, can be an effective way to alter the course of the discussion, improve interaction quality, or distribute critical information more evenly.

The findings of this study are better explained through Communication Networks Theory (Rogers and Kincaid 1981), which views communication not as a linear transmission of messages but as an interactive process of mutual understanding within a network of relationships. In this context, the YouTube comment is characterized by extremely low density and near-zero reciprocity values. This suggests that most users post comments independently without engaging in two-way exchanges, reflecting a limited degree of convergence among participants. Nonetheless, the high modularity value (0.814) indicates that users still form issue-based micro-communities, where discussions revolve around shared viewpoints or ideological alignments. This structure supports the notion that the YouTube comment section operates as a fragmented communication network, a space where meaning is constructed collectively within clusters but seldom negotiated across them.

The YouTube network surrounding "Louis Theroux: The Settlers" reveals a structurally fragmented communication environment characterized by extremely low density (0.0000), high modularity (0.814), and the presence of high-centrality bridge actors. These metrics jointly indicate that engagement occurs within insulated discussion clusters rather than across them, producing

expressive yet disconnected exchanges. While participation appears broad, interaction remains shallow and minimally reciprocal. Within Rogers and Kincaid's (1981) framework, such fragmentation constrains mutual understanding, the core of communication, showing that the comment section functions less as an integrative public sphere and more as a constellation of micro-publics. Theoretical implications extend beyond message analysis toward examining relational topology, where near-zero density and strong modular segmentation expose structural barriers to meaning convergence.

From a governance and discourse perspective, the observed modularity mirrors echo-chamber dynamics: homogeneous clusters that reinforce internal consensus while excluding alternative views. Bridge actors like @Oml708t occupy strategic positions that link otherwise isolated communities, underscoring the importance of brokerage for cross-cluster dialogue. Governance strategies, therefore, should move beyond content removal to relational interventions that enhance connective participation and visibility across clusters. For conflict discourse analysis, this fragmented structure signals communication that is expressive and emotionally charged rather than deliberative, parallel arenas of identity affirmation rather than shared reasoning, revealing how network fragmentation shapes the very texture of public conflict online.

CONCLUSION

The study of the comment section under the video "That seems sociopathic. | Louis Theroux: The Settlers" (May 16–June 14, 2025) shows a public conversation that is fragmented with minimal cross-group connectivity. From 7,448 comments posted by 5,402 actors, we identified 3,628 separate interaction components. At the system level, the network has a diameter of 3 (messages travel only a few steps when connections do occur), but a density of 0.000 indicates that ties between commenters are extremely rare. A modularity score of 0.814 confirms that the discussion splits into many issue clusters rather than a single, unified public sphere. This pattern aligns with Communication Network Theory (Rogers and Kincaid 1981): convergence of meaning is hard to achieve because sustained two-way exchange is rare; what dominates is opinion expression inside parallel micro-publics.

At the actor level, key roles are uneven. The account @edwardhomson6005 occupies a central position by degree (degree 178; in-degree 178, out-degree 0) and also appears in the "most replied to" and "most liked" categories, functioning as an opinion leader or amplifier that others reference. Meanwhile, the actor with the highest betweenness, @Oml708t, serves as a broker linking otherwise isolated clusters and can shape information flow across groups. By contrast, some of the most frequent commenters (e.g., @jessehash1583) do not automatically receive many replies or support, underscoring that commenting intensity is not the same as structural influence.

Implications: First, for academic research on communication networks, these results underscore the importance of structural metrics (density, modularity, degree, and betweenness) to assess diffusion and convergence potential, rather than relying on comment volume alone. Second, for platform governance, relational interventions are more relevant than content deletion: increase cross-cluster visibility, strengthen healthy bridging channels, and monitor broker roles that can either accelerate dialogue or amplify misinformation. Third, for conflict-related discourse analysis, a highly modular structure with near-zero density tends to produce expressive, emotional, and parallel arenas rather than integrated deliberation across identities.

Limitations: edges were defined only as reply ties; no spam/bot filtering was applied; and observation was limited to May 16–June 14, 2025, for a single clip on Louis Theroux's official channel. Future work should explicitly measure reciprocity, track longitudinal dynamics across episodes/clips, combine content/sentiment analysis, and test cross-cluster design interventions for their impact on argumentative exchange quality. Overall, the consistent quantitative signals (density 0.000; modularity 0.814; diameter 3; concentrated influence among a few opinion leaders and brokers) indicate that this comment network is a constellation of expressive micro-publics with shallow connectivity and limited convergence of meaning.

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