

CHAPTER IV

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Media Sensationalism and the Distortion of Truth

The first research question investigates the depiction of media institutions as agents of disinformation and sensationalism in the post-truth society through the film *Don't Look Up* (2021). The media is not portrayed as a neutral channel for public information, but as an institution that turns serious scientific information into entertainment. This subsection examines how the film does this. The film shows a media environment where entertainment value trumps the urgency of information through the program *The Daily Rip* and its hosts, Brie Evantee and Jack Bremmer.

This situation is consistent with Entman's (1993) framing theory which states that the media does not simply present reality as it is but selects certain aspects of an event and presents them in a particular way, based on institutional interests. The media in *Don't Look Up* (2021) do not take the crisis of the comet seriously as a threat that requires urgent attention. The issue is rather presented in a fun and entertaining manner to the audience. The condition also fits well with the description of sensationalism media provided by McQuail (2010), in which audience satisfaction supersedes facts and social responsibility.

4.1.1 The Daily Rip and Its Role as an Entertainment Machine

The talk show hosted by Brie Evantee and Jack Bremmer in the movie is the main topic in the corrupt media world. This talk show reveals the way in which the media works when all news is corrupted by the entertainment industry. Think

about scientifically critical facts, such as the appearance of the comet that endangers our planet, being announced in a manner that is way too laid-back and funny. Here the news is not taken as something frightening and urgent, but as regular news material, and it needs to be funny and sharp.

In truth, there were some clues regarding the reluctance of the studio towards engaging in deep conversations, even before Randall, Mindy, and Kate Dibiasky had gotten out of the green room. A stage manager casually told them, “Just remember, keep it light and fun. Jack and Brie like to have a good time” (*Don’t Look Up*, 2021, 33:56). What seems like a minor comment is really revealing of the importance they place on the matter: the substance of the information is not important, but the mood of the show is. These scientists are not asked even about the scientific significance of their findings. Instead, they are told exactly how to behave to suit the stage’s needs. In short, before the general public could even be notified, the doomsday comet news had been reduced to entertainment.



Picture 4.1 *The Daily Rip* and its hosts, Brie Evantee and Jack Bremmer

(*Don’t Look Up*, 2021, 0.36.55)

Picture 4.1 displays the studio setting. The Daily Rip studio is designed to look very bright and clean, with lighting that eliminates shadows and makes everything feel comfortable. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2020), the

setting in a film is not merely a backdrop, as it can influence how viewers perceive what is happening in the scene. In this case, the studio setting creates the impression that everything inside is safe and harmless. So, even before anyone mentions the comet, the audience is already being led to feel that the situation is not something too serious or alarming—at least based on the room’s appearance.



Picture 4.2 *Jack and Brie were having a casual broadcast chat*



Picture 4.3 *Randall’s full-scale panic attack*

(Don’t Look Up, 2021, 0.32.06 – 0.32.27)

Picture 4.2 and 4.3 demonstrate how the film uses medium shots for Jack and Brie, as well as for Randall in a different room. Although the types of shots are similar, the impressions they evoke are quite different. The medium shots of Jack and Brie show them in a relaxed state, sitting and conversing from a comfortable distance, a typical space for social interaction, as described by Bordwell and Thompson (2020). The atmosphere feels relaxed and controlled. However, the medium shot of Randall in the bathroom is technically the same framing but shows something different. Randall is tense. He tries to calm himself down, even taking xanax just to be able to go on. So the shot is the same, but the situation in the shot is totally different. The film cuts back and forth between these shots to demonstrate that Jack and Brie are still in a comfortable middle ground, whereas Randall is already struggling mentally because he knows how serious the topic to be discussed

is. This is just another part of the show to Jack and Brie, but for Randall this is something a lot heavier than that.

4.1.2 The Interview – When Truth Meets Entertainment

The first interview scene between Randall, Kate and the host of The Daily Rip is one of the most important scenes in the film to understand how the media operates within this story. This scene shows how the media deals with serious information not by outright refusing to acknowledge it, or calling it fake. Instead, the media presents the information in a tone and structure that makes it seem less serious than it actually is. So, the truth remains, but it is surrounded by elements of entertainment that diminish its impact.



Picture 4.4 and Picture 4.5 *Randall and Kate seated at The Daily Rip desk alongside Brie and Jack*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.37.12 – 0.38.50)

Picture 4.4 and 4.5 show the four characters sitting at a table in a medium-long shot. This shot effectively illustrates the room's layout. Brie and Jack appear relaxed and at ease, as if they are used to being filmed, and their body language suggests that they feel in control. In contrast, Randall and Kate look tense, with postures suggesting they are weighed down by something serious in an environment

that seems ill-suited for it. Even before the dialogue continues, the visual framing already highlights a clear difference between the two parties in the scene.

The conversation starts with Jack asking a question that is not directly about the comet. “*Can I ask one thing before we move on?*” he asks, “*Is there a life out there? Yes or no? Final answer*” (*Don’t Look Up*, 2021, 0:37:16). Such a question distracts from the main point. Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) say this is an instance of sensationalist reframing, changing the topic to something that seems more entertaining or emotionally more gripping. Randall does not actively protest the shift at this time; he responds conversationally and the interview tone begins to take direction from the host. The interview has shifted from the comet to the conversational style of the show.

Later, when Kate tries, at last, to explain the comet, Jack’s response again shows how the situation is framed by the logic of entertainment.

Jack : “*This sounds very, very exciting. Exploding stars. Like stars actually explode? Now how big is this thing? Could it destroy someone’s house? Is that possible?*”

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 0.38.48 – 0.39.20)

The question about “*someone’s house*” is not a scientific question. It is more like a way to make something extremely large and dangerous feel smaller and more relatable in our daily lives. It makes it more domestic, easier to talk about casually and turns something global into something local. Then, when Randall explains that the comet is actually a threat to the whole planet, Jack continues to think along the same lines and says:

Jack : *“The entire planet. Ok, so while it's damaging that, can it hit this one house in particular, that's just off the coast of New Jersey? It's my ex-wife's house. I just need it to be hit. Can we make that happen?”*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.38.48 – 0.39.20)

The serious information about planetary destruction remains at this moment, but mixed with humor and personal jokes. Debord (1994) states that in modern capitalist culture, real experience is frequently substituted by images and performances that seem more engaging than reality itself. In this scene, Jack does not deny the comet, he reframes it to fit the show's entertainment flow. This means that the situation becomes less urgent, although the actual threat is still very serious.

4.1.3 Kate's Breakdown and the Media's Response

The scene slowly moves toward its most important turning point when Kate can no longer keep following the way the show is handling its message. At this moment, she breaks away from the emotional tone that has been expected of them since the beginning of the interview. It is the point where the tension inside the scene becomes more visible because the way she sees the situation and the way the show treats it start to clash directly.

Kate : *“I'm sorry... Are we not being clear! We're trying to tell you that the entire planet is about to be destroyed.”*

Brie : *“It's something we do around here to keep the bad news light.”*

Kate : *“Well maybe the destruction of the entire planet isn't supposed to be fun. Maybe it's supposed to be terrifying... and upsetting... and maybe we're supposed to stay up all night every night crying... when we're all 100% for sure going to fucking die!”*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.39.35 – 0.40.10)



Picture 4.6 *Kate's face at the moment of her outburst*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.40.08)

Kate is captured in a close-up shot at this moment. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2020), close-ups are often used to convey emotion more clearly because they bring the audience closer to the character's face. In this scene, the close-up makes Kate's emotional state more visible and separates her from the rest of the studio environment. She looks very serious and emotional, yet the space around her still feels like a controlled media setting. Her response is in sharp contrast to the environment in which she is standing.

From this point on, the reaction of the hosts is crucial for understanding how the media space in the film functions. Instead of dealing with the substance of Kate's message, they shift the conversation to her emotional response.

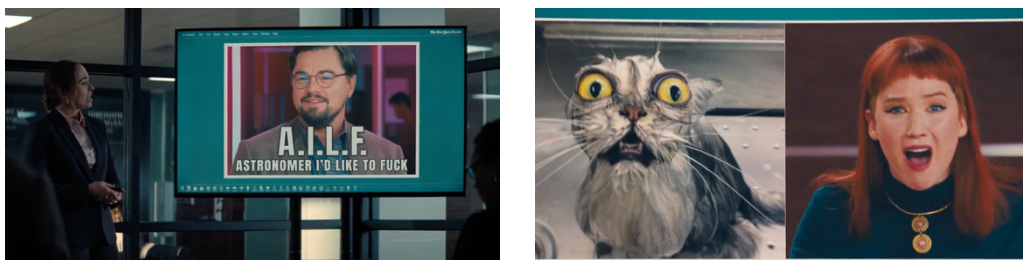
- Brie : *"Is she always like that? Was it something I said?"*
Randall : *"Maybe I should have given her that extra Xanax that I had."*
Jack : *"Listen, if you don't have enough Xanax, we all have enough around here!"*
Brie : *"A spoonful of Xanax helps the medicine go down!"*
Jack : *"I knew I'd like this guy. I knew it!"*
Brie : *"The handsome astronomer can come back anytime. Yelling lady, not so much."*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.40.24 – 0.40.55)

In this part, the situation becomes more clear about how the message is treated. The talk about the comet Kate warned of is forgotten and now we focus on her emotional antics in the studio. She is depicted as unstable and Randall is depicted more positively as ‘the handsome astronomer’. There is a gap here where emotional control is more important than the actual science information. It seems that the message is no longer judged by its seriousness, but by how well it fits in with the tone of the program.

According to Entman (1993), framing is a process of selection and emphasis, or non-emphasis and omission, of a number of elements of reality. This scene foregrounds Kate's emotional response and backgrounds the scientific warning she is making. At the same time, Randall is framed more favorably because he adapts better to the show's entertainment style. Thus, the media space here is not neutral, because it clearly decides which part of the situation to highlight based on what fits the program better.

Then this way of handling information becomes even more visible when the film shows the analytics of their appearance:



Picture 4.7 and Picture 4.8 *The difference between Kate and Randall's public appearances*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.42.10 – 0.42.30)

- Media Quant : “*Randall and Kate, your TV appearance got some nice traffic when Ms. Dibiasky cursed. But unfortunately, there was an immediate backlash that quickly became a meme...*”
- Media Quant : “*Dr. Mindy on the other hand had very high favorables. Vegan Babe wrote 'Meooow. Me likey hunky Star Man.' Some accounts called him 'The Bedroom Eyes Doomsday Prophet' and 'A.I.L.F.' which means 'Astronomer I'd Like to Fuck.'*”
- Media Quant : “*Clicks overall were below basic weather and traffic stories.*”

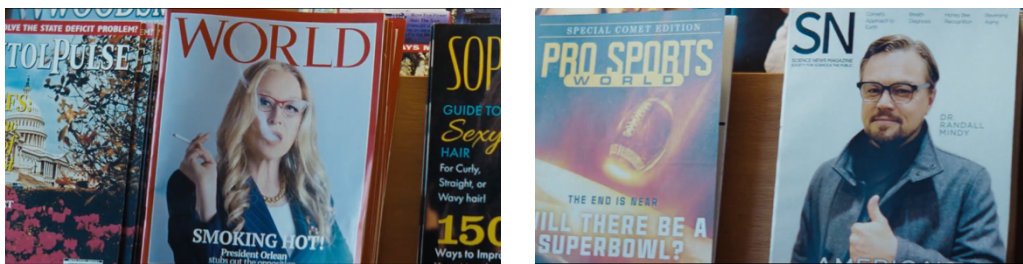
This aspect of the analysis highlights an important point about the manner in which media attention operates in the film. The harsh warnings given by Kate regarding the devastation to the world get less attention compared to basic information such as traffic updates or the weather report. The online audience turns her expressions of emotion into meme culture, adding to the trivialization of her message. In a sensationalist media system, “*emotional reactions are more valued than factual content*” (McQuail, 2010). An excellent example of this statement is seen from the analysis of this clip, which shows how information loses its importance once it becomes part of a media system.

4.1.4 The Commercialization of the Scientist – Randall’s Transformation

The movie goes deeper as Randall faces the repercussions of his first appearance on The Daily Rip. From here on, the film skillfully presents a slow but steady process by which Randall changes out of a genuine concern as a scientist for how low the planet is caring, and turns into content and finally becoming another “tool” for slaughtering to divert attention from matters that the government and entertainment industry use. A curious way, because that metamorphosis happens slowly over time rather than at once and bite by bite eats away at his integrity as the

media shapes public sentiment of him. Through Randall, the film reveals the wild truth about how swiftly a scientist's identity is pulled into the system's void; an ecosystem that can buff, repackage and sell it off for commercial use.

The first small sign of this change appears in a scene at a newsstand, where different magazine covers are shown. The headlines include “*Earth's Big Moment!*”, “*How the Comet Changes NFL Playoff Race!*”, a Time Magazine cover of President Orlean with the headline “*SMOKING HOT!*”, and another cover showing Randall as “*America's Scientist.*” These headlines already show that the comet event is no longer treated as a single serious issue but instead is split into many different types of media content.



Picture 4.9 and Picture 4.10 *President Orlean and Randall on the cover of the magazine*

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 0.56.03 – 0.56.04)

Pictures 4.9 and 4.10 illustrate the newsstand scene, bringing these media framings together in a single depiction and facilitating a clearer understanding of how the situation is being constructed. The comet, which is actually an extinction-level threat, is categorized as entertainment, such as celebrity news, sports discussion, and political image-building. In this context, Randall is cast as a public figure or brand, while Kate is pushed into a negative position in the media narrative. Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) explain that sensationalist media often simplifies

complex issues by focusing on individuals and personal stories rather than the broader problem. In this scene, the scientists are not merely researchers, but characters who fill particular media roles, one as a respected figure and the other as a scapegoat for the public.

By the time Randall shows up again on *The Daily Rip*, you can already see the change in his character. He is no longer portrayed as the scientist who discovered the comet, but is cast in a different role to reassure the public. Instead of explaining the scientific urgency he starts to speak in a softer more comforting tone.



Picture 4.11 *Randall in his second Daily Rip appearance*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.56.22)

Jack : *"Dr. Mindy there is a lot of fear out there, America, around the world, parents don't know what to say to their kids, what would you say to them to help them understand?"*

Jack : *"I'm sure many of us are frightened. But I can assure you our best and brightest are on the job. I've seen the science on this plan... and it is sound."*

Brie : *I know your words are a great comfort to all of our viewers Dr. Randall. We thank you for your courage and service. I just like to say, whenever I feel afraid or alone, I think of you and I just feel... Better."*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.56.35 – 0.56.18)

The medium close-up in Picture 4.11 tells a visual story of transformation. In his earlier appearance, he was shown with the hosts in a more tense situation, but

here he appears in a more comfortable, focused framing that makes him look more like a public figure. Medium close-up shots would suggest a perhaps more intimate relationship between the character and the audience (Bordwell and Thompson, 2020). Here this kind of intimacy is not natural but rather constructed by the media environment itself. This seems to be a way the system gets the audience emotionally connected with Randall rather than informing them of the scientific message he is meant to convey.

There is also a change in the speech of the narrator at this point in the story. Previously, the narrator, Randall, was talking very directly about the science involved. Now he uses phrases such as “*our best and brightest are on the job*” and “*the science is sound,*” which aren’t really scientific at all. They sound more like statements to calm people down. This, Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) write, is a circumstance in which information content is replaced gradually by emotional content as the media system remains fixated on audience comfort and engagement. So the scientific message becomes less about stating facts, more about managing feelings.

Later in the program, Randall is featured in a television commercial created by BASH Cellular in conjunction with the government that makes the process of commercialization even more explicit. In this commercial he is in an environment that resembles a standard advertisement, with soothing music and a domestic setting that is somewhat familiar and emotional.



Picture 4.12 *Randall appearing in the TV commercial*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.18.30 – 1.18.55)

Randall : *“Right now millions of you are having these same questions and doubts about the approaching comet. That's why BASH Cellular in conjunction with the US Government is creating a new hotline, free of charge to answer your questions. And who knows, maybe, just maybe one of our scientists... can be that friend we all need to lean on during uncertain times.”*

In this commercial, lower-third text shows Randall’s title as “Senior White House Science Advisor,” and that matters because that’s how his position is being used. His title is not used to explain scientific facts, but to create a feeling of safety and trust in the audience. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of highlighting certain aspects of reality for the purpose of advancing particular interests. Here Randall’s authority is appealed to, to promote a message that makes the public comfortable with a plan that has not been fully tested or clearly understood.

Randall’s development throughout this part of the story also reflects something that the film presents in an uncomfortable way. He does not resist the process of becoming a media personality. In fact, he is gradually absorbed into it. He goes to fancy parties and makes personal connections in that world and takes on his new public persona as a government advisor. McQuail (2010) argues that sensationalist media not only moulds people from the outside but also creates

situations in which people find themselves in the roles assigned by the system where these roles provide rewards of attention, status and influence. Randall is not forced into becoming a product of the media. It also happens because the system gives him reasons to remain in it. That's why his breakdown later on feels significant, because it's the moment when those rewards no longer is enough to keep him quiet or in control.

4.1.5 Randall's Breakdown – The Cost of Finally Speaking

This section of analysis shows what happens when Randall is pushed to his limits after all that has happened to him in the media system. The film does not show something sudden but rather a buildup that has been going on for a long time. So, his final appearance on The Daily Rip does not immediately look like a breakdown. It begins more like a normal interview situation, but with Randall already in a mental state where he has been holding too much information and keeping it in silence for too long. At the same time, he is sitting there while Jack and Brie talk casually about BASH stock prices, and they do so in a way that feels relaxed and almost detached from how serious the comet situation actually is.



Picture 4.13 and Picture 4.14 *Randall shows visible frustration with the host*
(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 1.29.30 – 1.30.40)

Jack : *“Well listen, if BASH's stock is any indicator, then we don't have to worry about the peer review. It is going gangbusters.”*

Randall : *“WOULD YOU PLEASE STOP BEING SO FUCKING PLEASANT! I'm sorry. Not everything needs to sound so goddamn clever or charming or likable all the time. Sometimes, we just need to be able to say things to one another. We need to hear things.”*

Before Randall even fully explodes verbally, the contrast between Picture 4.13 and Picture 4.14 already shows that something is about to break. In Picture 4.13, both hosts appear in a medium shot, looking very relaxed, even smiling, as they discuss stock performance in a situation where the world is actually facing extinction. In Picture 4.14, it is seen that Randall appears in a medium shot, but here he has an entirely different body language than before. His pose is stiffened, and his face expresses his inability to retain the composed public persona of himself that was established earlier. Bordwell and Thompson (2020) explain that medium shots can show both what a character is doing and how their body reacts simultaneously, making it easier to see the difference between what is performed and what is actually felt. When these two shots are placed side by side, the difference becomes very clear. One character is still comfortably within the system, while the other is already beginning to break out emotionally.



Picture 4.15 and Picture 4.16 *Randall's final appearance on The Daily Rip*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.30.38 – 1.33.10)

Randall : *“We took a FUCKING PICTURE OF IT! What other proof do we need? And if we can't all agree at the bare minimum that a giant comet the size of Mount Everest hurtling its way toward planet Earth is NOT A FUCKING GOOD THING, then what the hell happened to us? How do we even talk to each other? What have we done to ourselves? How do we fix it? We should've deflected this comet when we had the fucking chance... I'm sure many of the people out there aren't even going to listen to what I just said because they have their own political ideology. But I assure you, I am not on one side or the other. I'm just telling you the fucking truth.”*

The depiction of Randall in Picture 4.15 and Picture 4.16 also appears to be different in comparison with his previous appearances. In his celebrity phase he was often framed in a way that felt more controlled and comfortable but here that feeling is gone completely. The medium close-up of Picture 4.15 already starts to remove that distance. The close-up of Picture 4.16 makes all even more direct. His face is no longer molded by a media-friendly image, and it is a lot like Kate's expression in her earlier breakdown scene, in that it is raw and no longer controlled. Everything around him in the studio still looks normal, but his expression no longer fits that environment.

After this outburst, the consequences come very quickly. Randall is taken out of the studio, and he is even placed with a hood over his head before being put into an unmarked FBI vehicle.



Picture 4.17 *FBI removed Randall from the grid*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.33.28)

Brie : *“Why did you do that? I really liked you. And I despise most people”.*
Randall : *“You know, I really thought I loved you.”*
Brie : *“Really? Wow. That’s wild.”*
Stocky FBI Agent : *“Ma’am. You need to go. We need to get this man off the grid.”*
Randall : *“Are you still there?”*
Brie : *“No.”*

The short interaction between Randall and Brie in this moment becomes important because it shows how the relationship that was formed inside the media environment does not really survive outside of it. When Randall stops acting in the expected media manner, everything around him falls apart very quickly. Entman (1993) explains that those who control framing also control what is allowed to be seen or heard, and in this case Randall’s statement is no longer treated as information, but instead as something dangerous that needs to be removed from the public space.

After being released, Randall tries to return to his normal life and goes back to Lansing, Michigan, using a rideshare car. This moment is portrayed as a quiet transition, in which he is no longer part of any media system or public role. He is alone in a car, and during this journey he finally looks outside and sees the comet directly for the first time, without any media framing around it.



Picture 4.18 and Picture 4.19 *Randall stopped his car, looking up at the sky, other drivers also getting out of their cars around him*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.36.25 – 1.38.30)

Randall : *“What the hell?... There it is. There you are. There you are. Is anyone else seeing this? That's it. That's the comet! Look! It's right there.”*

Picture 4.18 and Picture 4.19 both use medium framing, but the situation around him feels completely different from earlier scenes in the film. In Picture 4.18, Randall is shown from the side, pointing at the sky, with no studio setup, cameras, or controlled environment. In Picture 4.19, the frame is wider and shows other people also stepping out of their cars and looking at the same sky. The environment is just an open road and the sky above Michigan here. This is important because it is so different from everything that has happened previously. Randall had been in a media system that had turned the comet into a kind of content, or entertainment, but here he is experiencing it firsthand, without framing or explanation. Debord (1994) points out that in the contemporary society, people often perceive reality through images or representations instead of through their interactions. However, here the viewer witnesses a brief escape from this pattern, for now Randall perceives the comet as reality and not a media representation.

Afterwards, Randall is immersed back into the media world, although this time it is a children's television program. It's even more curated and simplified than

The Daily Rip. It uses puppets, children, and a very cheerful atmosphere that already presumes that everything will end well. Randall is expected to go along with the script and give a reassuring answer, but he completely breaks that expectation.



Picture 4.20 and Picture 4.21 *Randall alongside Sammy the puppet and two child actors on the children's show set*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.39.10 – 1.39.32)

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Sammy Puppet | : <i>“Dr. Mindy, the President's plan to save Earth and make it so that we can all have a home is going to work, right?”</i> |
| Randall | : <i>“Every single man, woman and child on this planet is going to die.”</i> |
| Child Actor | : <i>“I don't like him. He makes me sad.”</i> |
| Puppeteer | : <i>“Um, yeah, this is not what we rehearsed...”</i> |
| Randall | : <i>“Kids, listen. You tell your parents that President Orlean and Isherwell are sociopaths and fascists!”</i> |

The child actor's answer, *“I don't like him. He makes me sad,”* is important because it signals that this environment is built to keep emotional comfort above all else. McQuail (2010) says that sensationalist media opt for emotional security rather than uncomfortable facts and that the children's show is the most extreme manifestation of this concept. Randall introduces raw, unfiltered reality into this space, and the system rejects it immediately, because it does not fit into the emotional structure the program is trying to maintain.

More generally, considering Randall's journey across sub-chapters 4.1.4 and 4.1.5, it becomes clear that the film is constructing a coherent understanding of what happens when a person is absorbed into media systems such as this, and then tries to speak outside of them. The system gives him first visibility, comfort and attention but it also requires him to be silent or to change his message. He remains in this position for a long time. Only when he finally breaks out of it, does he lose all that went with it: his status, his public role, his relationships within this system. But the comet is still the same, outside all these strata of mediation, visible to anyone who looks up.

4.2 Disinformation and the Construction of Post-Truth Narratives

This part of the analysis continues the discussion from the previous sub-chapter but shifts the focus a little bit. While 4.1 focused on how the media turns serious scientific issues into entertainment through sensationalism, this section turns to something more direct and intentional. It's about disinformation, that is, when information is not just made entertaining but is actually shaped in a way that completely changes its meaning and serves certain interests. In this section the film is analyzed in order to show how false or distorted versions of reality are produced and treated as if they were true.

Disinformation is not just random misinformation, it is constructed in a structured way and usually has a purpose, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) explain. It is used to further the aims of the people or institutions that produce it. This process is illustrated in the movie *Don't Look Up* (2021) with two main characters who have power in various forms. President Janie Orlean means political power, while

Peter Isherwell means corporate power. Each shows, in its own way, how the control of information can affect the public perception of reality. In this sense, the film does not show fiction as an exceptional event but rather places it inside a structure in which owning the story becomes more important than truth itself.

4.2.1 The Oval Office – When Power Rewrites Science

One of its most famous scenes, the meeting in the Oval Office, makes visible this idea from early on in the film. This is where Randall, Kate and Dr. Oglethorpe finally have a moment to sit down with President Orlean to share the news of the comet. The key is not that the President denies the comet outright, though she does. What made this scene relevant was how she handles and responds to the science, which is that, instead, she's busy politicizing and working the emergency information to suit her political agenda.



Picture 4.22 and Picture 4.23 *Randall and Kate seated across from President Orlean and Jason*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.18.14 – 0.19.56)

The scene starts in a way that already gives a small clue about how the situation will go. President Orlean is shown checking her phone while everyone else waits, and this small detail already suggests that the comet situation, though extremely serious, is not what has her full attention at that moment. When Randall

finally begins to explain the scientific findings, the response he gets is not really about the science itself, but more about how the information should be presented.

Randall : *"There is basically 100% certainty of impact."*
Orlean : *"Please don't say 100%."*
Aide : *"Can we just call it a potentially significant event."*
Kate : *"But it's not 'potentially' going to happen. It is going to happen."*
Randal : *"Exactly, 99,78% to be exact."*
Jason : *"Oh, great! Okay so it's not 100%"*
Dr. Oglethorpe : *"The Scientists never like to say 100%."*
Orlean : *"Call it 70% and let's move on."*
Kate : *"It's not even close to seventy percent."*
Orlean : *"You can't go around to people telling them there's a 100% chance that they are going to die."*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.20.00 – 0.20.40)

This conversation is one of the film's clearest illustrations of what Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) describe as disinformation, particularly the deliberate manipulation of factual information to serve institutional interests. President Orlean does not challenge the scientific findings presented by the astronomers. Instead, she asks them to communicate the information differently by reducing its urgency and making the threat appear more manageable. Her instruction to *"call it 70% and let's move on"* reflects more than a simple disagreement over scientific interpretation. It demonstrates how political authority can reshape the public presentation of facts for strategic purposes. In this scene, the President effectively alters the reported probability of planetary extinction in order to protect her political standing.

Entman (1993) argues that the one who frames the information also frames how people will understand it. In this scene, Orlean has the power to determine which version of the truth can be part of public discourse. Even when she says, *"Okay, let's bottom line this. How much will this cost? What's the point of this?"*

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 0.21.10), it becomes clear that the comet is not approached first as a scientific emergency, but as something to be calculated with on the basis of political consequences. The biggest change in the scene happens when the subject turns to timing and elections.

Orlean : *“Alright, alright, let me think here... When are the midterms?”*

Jason : *“Three weeks.”*

Orlean : *“Three weeks. If this breaks before then we could lose Congress and then there's nothing we can do about this anyway... At this exact moment... I say we sit tight and assess.”*

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 0.21.20 – 0.22.00)

The timing and self-interest more than the urgency or the evidence, are what drives political decision-making, and this moment shows that. According to McIntyre (2018), in a post-truth environment, people's decisions are frequently influenced by identity and emotional considerations rather than facts. Here, the decision to postpone the announcement of comet-related information to the public was not based on science at all, but on the risk of losing political power.

So what this scene tells us, then, is not just misinformation in the form of lies, but something more subtle, more structural. It is the controlling of when information comes out, how it gets framed, how it gets filtered long before any regular people see it. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) note that these types of practice are among the hardest to detect as they do not necessarily emerge as a blatant falsehood, but rather a type of truth filtered through power.

4.2.2 Peter Isherwell and the Corporate Logic of Disinformation

While President Orlean is the anchor holding the crown on political misinformation, Peter Isherwell is the engine that's behind the crown holder on corporate misinformation. BASH Corporation's CEO Isherwell embodies the ways information can be manipulated into modern business logic. Not through idle chit chat, nor stilted internal meetings, but via a big budget theater staging of an ostensible tech product launch: something pretty close to real-world tech keynote stages. At the first glance, what this product gives to its public is a show, what it sells is not merely a gadget but an image, visuals as wrapping paper and hegemony of meaning.



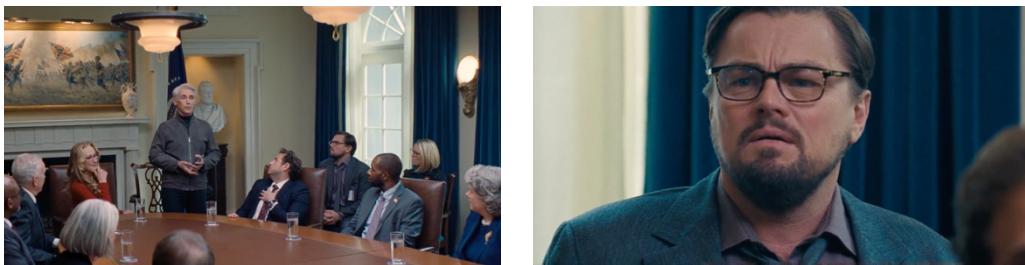
Picture 4.24 and Picture 4.25 *Isherwell during the BASH convention center presentation*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.26.31 – 0.26.35)

Medium close up of Isherwell with a child who holds a product from BASH. The frame captures the portrayal of an informal, friendly interaction one that can be compared to a common consumer scene. As explained by Bordwell and Thompson (2020), medium shots are known for creating a sense of intimacy between the subject and the viewer. However, this sense of familiarity is forced here since it is intentionally used to make the viewers feel at ease with the brand.

Subsequently, in Picture 4.25, this image is represented through an extreme long shot of a large screen located behind Isherwell, starting with the depiction of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with God stretching his hand to reach Adam, and slowly transitioning into that of a smartphone. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2020), extreme long shots tend to focus on the environment to create an awe-inspiring environment. In this case, this effect makes BASH's technology almost sacred, almost divine, as if it is bound up with something larger than business or profit. Thus, the presentation gradually develops the idea that the company sells not just devices, but the vision of human progress and creation.

This logic becomes increasingly clear later in the film during the scene in the Oval Office, when Isherwell explains why the deflection mission was halted and replaced with a mining plan.



Picture 4.26 and Picture 4.27 Isherwell and Randall at the Oval Office presentation

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.08.38 – 1.10.20)

- Isherwell : *"As some of you know the most valuable minerals in the world are fast becoming the ones used to make cell phones and computers: yttrium, terbium, osmium, dysprosium... this comet hurtling towards earth actually contains at least thirty-two trillion dollars of these critical materials."*
- Randall : *"I'm sorry, is that why you aborted this entire mission because you are trying to mine the comet?"*
- Isherwell : *"When other metals are factored in this comet contains almost 140 trillion dollars' worth of assets."*

Randall : *"But what does any of this matter if we're all going to die?"*
Jason : *"Oh no... what if we're all rich! And we're safe!"*

Picture 4.26 and 4.27 show Isherwell and Randall in the same situation, yet their ways of thinking seem very different. Isherwell is depicted speaking calmly and composedly, as if the information he is conveying is logical and positive. In his view, the comet is not only a threat but also has tremendous economic value. Randall, on the other hand, reacts with skepticism because, from his perspective, monetary value becomes meaningless if human survival itself is not guaranteed.

Disinformation can also occur when factual information is presented in a misleading framework that distorts its meaning, as explained by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017). In this case, Isherwell does not deny the scientific fact that the comet is dangerous. He does not deny this fact, he accepts it, and then shifts the conversation entirely to economic opportunities. The figure of \$140 trillion becomes more important than the fact that the planet is in danger. This creates a situation where the question is no longer about survival, but about profit and resource extraction.

Even serious or dangerous situations can be transformed into opportunities for consumption and profit in the contemporary capitalist system (Debord, 1994). This logic is shown very well in this scene by Isherwell. And the comet, which should be seen as a threat at the global level, is instead turned into a precious resource. In this way, the meaning of reality is not denied, but rather diverted to serve corporate interests.

4.2.3 The “Don't Look Up” Campaign – Disinformation as Identity Politics

The most prominent form of disinformation in this film is the “Don't Look Up” Campaign. This section is important because it shows that disinformation is not just something that is created by those in power, but subsequently accepted and embraced by the general public as part of their identity. This chapter therefore not only concentrates on institutions but also on the dissemination of these ideas in society and their integration into the identity of the people.

President Orlean, who started the campaign, launched it at a public rally with a very specific rhetorical framing:



Picture 4.28 and Picture 4.29 “Don't Look Up” rally in the basketball stadium

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 1.39.33 – 1.41.10)

Orlean : *"You know why they want you to look up? Do you know why? Because they want you to be afraid! They want you to look up because they are looking down their noses at you. They think they're better than you."*

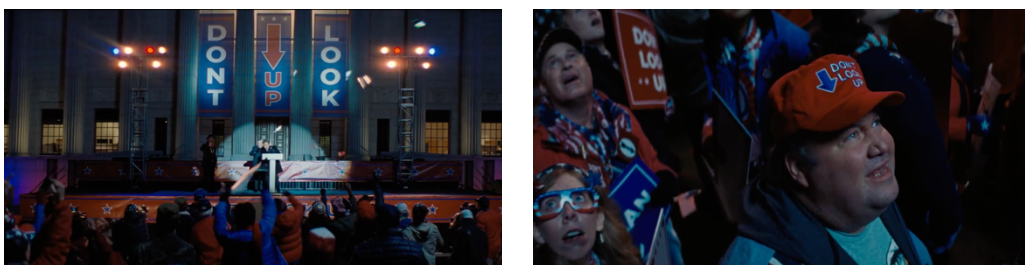
The extremely long-shot in Picture 4.28 is important because it shows us how big the demonstration is and how many people are involved. The stadium is filled with people, and they're not just listening as individuals, but responding as a group. It means in a way that the message is not just received as information but as a collective force that binds people together. And the red, white and blue hats and

the synchronized singing, they just amplify this feeling of unity, even though the foundation of that unity is really resistance.

In her speech, Orlean is not really talking about the comet. Instead she diminishes the scientific issue in relation to social position and identity. The expression ‘looking to the sky’ was taken as arrogance because it was as if those people who thought that there was really a comet were trying to be more clever than everybody else. The question was no longer about truth or evidence, but about “who is on which side,” as McIntyre (2018) characterized as identity-based political communication in a post-truth context.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) also explain how disinformation is much more powerful when it is a shared belief in a group. When people come to see belief as part of their identity, it becomes more and more difficult to give up even as the evidence changes. That’s the case with the “Don’t Look Up” campaign. This is not just a slogan anymore. The campaign has become a social and political self-identification.

The film then shows the final stage of this process in the scene of the final rally, as the comet starts to appear in the sky.



Picture 4.30 and Picture 4.31 “Don't Look Up” final rally in the white house

(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 1.47.28 – 1.48.13)

Loyal Supporter : *"What? What the hell is that!?"*
[Crowd turns and looks up at the comet]
Loyal Supporter : *"They fucking lied to us!"*
Jason : *"The President just texted me. 'Don't trip. It's all good. Don't trip.'"*

In the long shot of Figure 4.30, Jason is on stage but appears very small in relation to the crowd and the expanse around him. This helps illustrate how political communication at this time has become a kind of performance, with messages being heard by an audience already filled with emotion. This space is no longer a space for reflection but rather a stage on which beliefs are collectively displayed.

Then, in Picture 4.31, there is a close-up of one supporter looking up. This expression is a combination of surprise and realization. Medium close-ups are commonly used as a help to clarify emotional reactions to the audience and this shot highlights the exact moment where beliefs begin to crumble (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

The important thing about this scene is that the crowd is not simply seeing the comet for the first time. They also understand that their belief system no longer aligns with what they're seeing. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) state that regarding the impact of disinformation, one of the most damaging effects is not just the spread of false information but also the erosion of shared understanding within society. In this particular scene, we can see that such damage is actually occurring in the present, as the comet approaches in the background.

4.3 Public Ignorance as a Cultural Condition

The second research question of this thesis deals with the depiction of public ignorance and its construction by popular culture, media practices, political

identities, and refusal of scientific authority through the film *Don't Look Up* (2021). This analysis does not intend to make the error of narrowing all persons in the movie down into one category of internment afflicted idiot. Instead, this analysis attempts to unravel how the digital media system itself is designed in such a way that ignorance becomes normal. In this respect, public ignorance here is no longer simply incidental neglect but rather the rational outgrowth of how human attention tends to be managed, diverted and manipulated in daily life.

Michael Schudson (2008) reminds us in this digital age that publics are no longer ignorant due to a lack of information: we have too much information, in fact. The biggest task now is the management of attention span: How exactly does someone decide what is worth their gaze when exposure is so plentiful. Moreover, this is problematic because viewers are being brainwashed by the quick-paced nature of the media they consume, reinforcing a phenomenon that has been cited as “brain rot,” all while viewers no longer have their critical thinking skills at hand (Sunstein 2001), and they choose to navigate outside selective exposure. Using the example of the “echo chamber,” Sunstein shows how society comes to lock itself in information which merely supports its comfort, and ignores facts that might threaten its political self-image. Through this theoretical lens, this chapter will examine how *Don't Look Up* (2021) cinematically demonstrates that public ignorance is not an anomaly, but rather a failed product deliberately perpetuated by the system itself.

4.3.1 When Urgency Has to Wait

The film reveals this public ignorance even before the scientists enter the Oval Office. Kate, Randall and Dr. Oglethorpe are called to the White House to report on a comet that could wipe out all life on earth but they aren't taken seriously at first. The President walks past them. Jason tells them to wait. There are other matters to be dealt with first. So the scientists sit in the hall. They wait. People come. People go. There is a birthday party in the building. A general leaves because he has a flight to catch. Time passes, and the comet's urgency goes unheeded. It looks like the system does not know how to respond properly.

While waiting, the film also suggests that attention has moved elsewhere and this is made evident through what the characters are looking at on their phones:



Picture 4.32 and Picture 4.33 *Kate, Randall and Dr. Oglethorpe seated in the White House corridor*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.13.18 – 0.13.29)

- Kate : *"There's a bunch of stuff about their Nominee not being qualified... But I don't see any articles about our... thing."*
- Dr. Oglethorpe : *"Social media's going on and on about that singer Riley Bina and DJ Chello breaking up... That's too bad... They seem like sweet kids."*

This discrepancy points to an obvious imbalance in focus in the modern times. The news media is dominated by gossip about celebrities and entertainment,

whereas serious scientific discoveries go unreported. According to Schudson (2008), modern public attention is motivated not by public interest but by entertainment. In this context, society is experiencing a decline in attention span. When forced to choose between complex news about a comet or the entertaining drama of celebrity Riley Bina, people automatically choose the gossip because it provides instant entertainment. Therefore, the comet is ignored not because it is hidden, but because it does not align with what the media system prefers to promote.

Then the film continues to elaborate the idea that the public can be easily distracted from serious content to entertainment. The Daily Rip story about Riley Bina and DJ Chello was a big success and went way more viral than the comet news: huge enthusiasm met their reconciliation and proposal on air:



Picture 4.34 *The Mindy family watching The Daily Rip together*



Picture 4.35 *DJ Chello proposal in The Daily Rip*

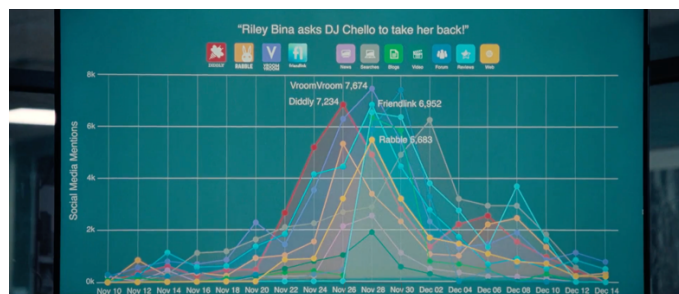
(*Don't Look Up*, 2021, 0.35.33 – 0.36.33)

- Evan : *"Diddy just exploded. So did Vroom Vroom."*
 Marshall : *"Wait, BASH News just gave me 8 push notifications. And my phone purchased DJ Chello's latest single. Without even asking. It just did that."*

The importance of Marshall's phone for orders song automatically becomes due to the fact that digital systems not only reproduce content but also respond in real time to the feelings of their users. This is no longer entirely a conscious

decision. As Sunstein (2001) explains, the architecture of contemporary media systems has been created with a singular aim to maximize engagement; that is why media platforms continuously deliver fuel that catches fire. Therefore, entertainment content blows through the market much faster, and significantly farther than serious public information like the warning on a comet.

This difference is even more striking when the film presents the analytics comparison between the comet story and the celebrity segment:



Picture 4.36 *The Riley Bina segment dwarfs anything generated by the comet announcement.*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.41.58)

- Media Quant : *“You can see this spike here is when Riley Bina asked to take DJ Chello back on the segment before you. We saw engagement across all social media platforms.”*
- Randall : *“What about our story?”*
- Media Quant : *“Clicks overall were below basic weather and traffic stories.”*

In the world of analytics, the scenario is presented in very straightforward terms. The comet is definitely an extinction level event, but it fails to receive the same level of publicity as entertainment, let alone weather does. As McQuail (2010) explains, in media systems where commercial involvement is the primary motivation, the evaluation of content takes place in relation to emotional impact, as opposed to practical importance. This means that what the movie depicts is how the

system perpetuates ignorance by continuously shifting attention from critical topics to more emotionally attractive ones.

4.3.2 Kate Dibiasky and the Meme Treatment of Truth

Kate's fate after her outburst on The Daily Rip becomes very clear for viewers through this movie's criticism of general ignorance in society. This is Kate's outburst of emotions, where she attempts to make it perfectly clear just how urgent this issue is scientifically speaking. But her words are swiftly consumed by the digital media culture and converted into memes, not taken as a warning. Consequently, the meaning of her message changes quickly from serious to humorous or absurd.



Picture 4.37 and Picture 4.38 *Kate's face as she watches the meme analytics screen*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.42.23 – 0.42.30)

Media Quant : *“There was an immediate backlash that quickly became a meme... Kate next to Charles Manson reading 'CRAZY. It's all in the eyes.' Another meme of Kate's deformed face looking like a monster... Another meme of Kate screaming paired with a wet cat... Another meme of Kate eating a baby, captioned 'Delicious!'”*

Kate's medium-long shot depicts how she helplessly observes the transformation taking place without any way to influence it. Through her eyes, the

audience observes how online culture modifies her identity in a live manner. According to Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), “information disorder” refers to the situation when real-world events are manipulated to achieve amusement. In the current context, Kate’s real emotional breakdown is being used for generating memes while the important message concerning the comet goes unnoticed. This is a case of brain rotting in the modern-day digital world as the internet culture does not mind the actual essence of the message but focuses on funny pictures.

It is even more surprising because Randall is portrayed in such a different way in the very same media analytics report.

- Media Quant : *“Dr. Mindy on the other hand had very high favorables. VeganBabe wrote 'Meooow. Me likey hunky Star Man.' Some accounts called him 'The Bedroom Eyes Doomsday Prophet' and 'A.I.L.F.' which means 'Astronomer I'd Like to Fuck.’”*
- Randall : *“I don’t see what that has to do with anything.”*
- Media Quant : *“And that’s everything. We did not feature or push on any sites. And clicks overall were below basic weather and traffic stories.”*
- Randall : *“So....that’s it? I don’t understand. I don’t understand. Why aren’t people terrified! What do we have to say? What do we have to do?”*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.42.23 – 0.42.55)

The same scientific warning is given by both Kate and Randall but the public reaction to each is painfully different. Kate is transformed into a meme figure of madness and hyperbole, while Randall becomes a hot media personality. How they are received is not a function of the content of their message. Framing tells us how to interpret information and what is important to consider (Entman 1993). In this case, the framing of Kate and Randall determines whether their message is taken seriously.

This is made even clearer later when Kate is working at a Drink-Mo store after losing her academic position and is recognized by a customer named Yule:



Picture 4.39 and Picture 4.40 *Kate behind the Drink-Mo counter, Yule holding up his phone showing her meme image*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.22.10 – 0.22.60)

Yule : *"Aren't you that girl from live TV who said, 'we're all gonna die'?"*

[He holds up his phone; his lock screen is a meme of Kate from The Daily Rip]

Yule : *"You are a stone-cold legend. Word is bond."*

Friend : *"I've got a picture of you on my board."*

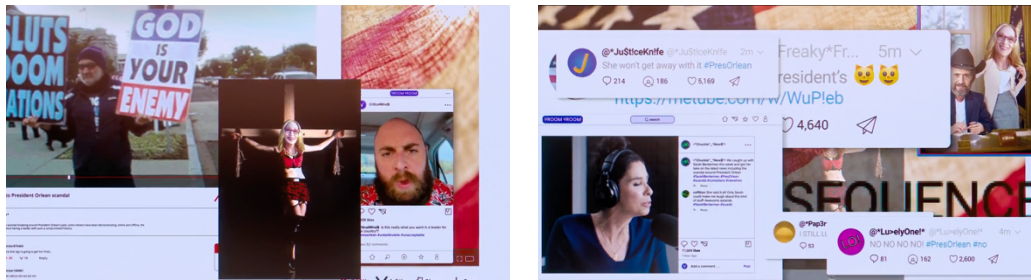
Kate is at this point well known to the public, but not in a way that has to do with her scientific role. She's a meme, not a scientist warning people about a real planetary danger. It's the emotional, viral image of her breakdown, not the meaning of what she actually said, that earned her this recognition. According to Schudson (2008), modern societies are both knowledgeable and ignorant simultaneously, and this is a good example of that. People know about Kate's image but nothing else about her message.

4.3.3 Political Distraction and the Scandal Economy

Another important layer of public ignorance depicted in the movie is the Conlon scandal and how it overlaps with the announcement of the comet The timing

of events is important here, as the film builds its argument around what first gets public attention and then what gets pushed aside after that.

The scientists return home after not gaining any real public attention on The Daily Rip, only to find the information about the comet still existing but not being discussed by the public. At this point the Conlon scandal comes to light and quickly dominates the media. It zips through news feeds, social media, and political conversations at a breakneck pace, showing how quickly we pay attention when the topic is more emotionally charged:



Picture 4.41 and Picture 4.42 *Shots of citizens protesting, people posting opinions on social media*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.22.10 – 0.22.60)

Anchor : *"It started with a photo many thought was an armpit or the chin of a man with a strange beard... But what's emerging now is a scandal that may rock the—"*

Reporter : *"President Orlean sent her Supreme Court nominee Sheriff Conlon a cell phone picture of her private part."*

This is the speed with which the scandal hits the public consciousness. Meanwhile, the comet situation which is still objectively an extinction-level threat is not given the same attention. It becomes something that is talked about everywhere. As Debord (1994) describes, contemporary media culture often replaces genuine social and political problems with an endless stream of images and stories that are more emotionally appealing. The Conlon scandal is a good example

of this, since it is the sort of thing that is very easy to spread and emotionally engage with, not scientific information, which is harder to process emotionally.

This change of focus makes the comet useful again, politically. When President Orlean's approval ratings drop because of the scandal, she suddenly begins treating the comet differently. She calls the scientists back, not because she has changed her understanding of the science, but because the comet can now be used for political recovery. This is the moment when Kate directly responds to that logic:



Picture 4.43 and Picture 4.44 *Kate in the Oval Office confronting Orlean*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.49.28 – 0.49.50)

Kate : "So basically what you're saying is—you're about to lose the midterms because you got caught sending pictures of your cooch to your porn star Sheriff and now suddenly it's to your advantage to act on the comet?"

This conversation explicitly illustrates that, in a post-truth landscape, political interests trump facts. The new President of Orleans, only interested in the comet after her approval ratings fell through the floor thanks to a photo scandal This is the definition of “economics of scandal” which means, public emotions focus on emotional matter rather than importance. The comet didn't become less of a danger, but for the President, it is only good for her if she can use it to save her political career. Debord (1994) explains that contemporary media culture supplants concrete

social issues with unrelenting spectacles of entertaining images easier for the public to consume.

Picture 4.44 is a medium close-up of Orlean, and what is visible here is not confusion but rather a sense of discomfort mixed with recognition. She does not deny the comment Kate made. Instead she plays it cool, even cracking a smile later on in the scene. The importance of this response is that it shows the system does not view the logic Kate describes as incorrect. What we have here is a sort of characterization of what some describe as “scandal economy,” in the sense that attention bounces around from one subject to another according to the heft of emotional response. The comet does not become more or less dangerous as it approaches, its threat only becomes politically convenient when it intersects with a moment of crisis for whoever is exercising power. At least some aspects of this phenomenon have nothing to do with importance or urgency, but what is trending or emotionally charged at the moment.

This logic is even more evident in the later public announcement of the comet. It becomes more of a media event that's been show staged than a simple press conference usually is. Filmed before a brightly-lit battleship (as if it were a film set) and even scheduled to interrupt a reality TV show. In other words, the announcement itself is constructed as entertainment. According to Sunstein (2001), these narrative consumers exposed to spectacle are more likely to respond with dramatic presentation than they would factual urgency. The film clearly reflects this condition by presenting planetary extinction not as a serious crisis, but as a form of

performance designed to attract public attention and make the issue easier for audiences to consume.

4.3.4 Patriot News and the Normalization of Science Denial

The film reveals a range of ignorance in the public eye in the Patriot News section, as shown when Kate and Dr. Oglethorpe have a discussion on TV with the congressman, Tenant, and the host of the program, Dan Pawketty. This ignorance does not mean anything passive. It is rather produced and maintained by the media that treats science as any other opinion. In the studio confrontation is the order of the day:



Picture 4.45 and Picture 4.46 *Congressman Tenant, Pawketty, Kate and Dr. Oglethorpe on the Patriot News set*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.57.44 – 0.58.12)

- Congressman Tenant : *“So these two Marxists wave around the word 'science' and we're all supposed to do whatever they say? How do we know there even is a comet?”*
- Kate : *“Mr. Pawketty, Congressman, this data has now been confirmed and peer reviewed by hundreds of world-renowned scientists.”*
- Congressman Tenant : *“And we're supposed to trust you? The comet's got your name!”*
- Kate : *“I don't see the relevancy. That doesn't even make sense.”*
- Dan Pawketty : *“Then why won't you answer the question?”*
- Kate : *“Then what's the question?”*
- Dr. Oglethorpe : *“Grow up, here. This is ridiculous!”*

Congressman Tenant’s question, “*How do we know there even is a comet?*” shows how politicians easily dismiss scientific facts. According to McIntyre (2018), this question represents the core of post-truth culture, where the existence of objective knowledge is treated as just another option or opinion up for debate. Tenant uses a strategic pattern to reject scientific review by simply branding the scientists as “Marxists.” Here, the talk show’s debate format is important because it makes a serious scientific consensus look equal to a politician's baseless argument. As a result, the media normalizes science denial and turns established facts into something optional. The audience is not encouraged to look at the empirical evidence, but is forced to choose a political side based on their identity.

From there, the film goes on to show how this way of framing information more directly affects public perception. Later, during a CVN segment, Kate’s ex-boyfriend, Phillip, reports a key statistic:



Picture 4.47 *Phillip Kaj is a guest on a CVN show*



Picture 4.48 *Kate, now a cashier at a giant Drink-Mo is watching the show*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.21.41 – 1.22.00)

Philip : *"37% don't want the comet to hit. That's actually down by three points. And 23%, they don't think there's a comet at all. And that number is way up."*

Picture 4.47 shows a television screen displaying Phillip as a guest on CVN, his image framed within the broadcast itself. The fact that his segment appears on

a television screen already positions him within the media system, where the information he delivers is filtered through the same kind of news framing that has appeared throughout the film. However, in Picture 4.48, the scene switches to Kate at the counter at Drink-Mo, observing the broadcast from a setting which is normal and isolated. It is not just an issue of contrast in visual appearance, but also a matter of symbolism. Phillip is speaking from within the media machine, while Kate is outside the media machine.

The numbers he provides say a great deal. The fact that 23% of people no longer believe the comet exists and continues to grow even though evidence mounts is an example of misinformation taking hold when constantly repeated in some communication environment. These are not just anybody, these are people with knowledge of the data. Instead, they're being shaped by a media culture that portrays scientific consensus as politically motivated and that encourages skepticism toward institutional knowledge. McIntyre (2018) identifies this condition as central to post-truth culture where truth is not grounded in evidence but selected based on identity and belief.

4.3.5 The Limits of Rational Engagement – Randall on Diddly (Twitter)

The criticism of public misunderstanding in the film is generalized to suggest that the problem is not exclusive to the audiences. Even scientists, who are typically the most reliable source of factual knowledge, can be drawn into the same digital environment that spreads confusion. Randall on Diddly (Twitter) In a quiet but telling moment, we see Randall arguing with users heavily invested in

conspiracy theories. The scene is not built on drama, but on how normal this kind of interaction has become in the online world, even for experts.



Picture 4.49 and Picture 4.50 *Randall is on his home computer arguing with people on Diddly*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 0.46.30 – 0.46.58)

- Randall : *“My God honey, this guy doesn't even know what a heliocentric orbit is and he's calling me a crackpot. He says Jewish billionaires invented the comet so the government can confiscate our liberty and our guns. #DontBeScared.”*
- June : *“You've been on that site a lot lately.”*
- Randal : *“I've got over a quarter million subscribers. I've got to use my voice to get the truth out there, right?”*

Randall's is a tough position. He believes that these discussions are his small part of setting the record right and he's preaching it to over two hundred thousand people on his channel. To him, defending against accusations online was equivalent to defending scientific truth. But the conversation he takes up is not structured to honor clarity or evidence. However, these conspiracy content is still live and the hashtag #DontBeScared did not reduce in normal banter but their effectiveness further increased. June, in a throwaway line, says *“You've been on that site a lot lately,”* and while that is a quiet note of alarm, it also suggests something larger: the site itself has started to define rational engagement.

The contradiction is part of a bigger claim made by Sunstein (2001), which states that digital media systems are designed to not facilitate any form of

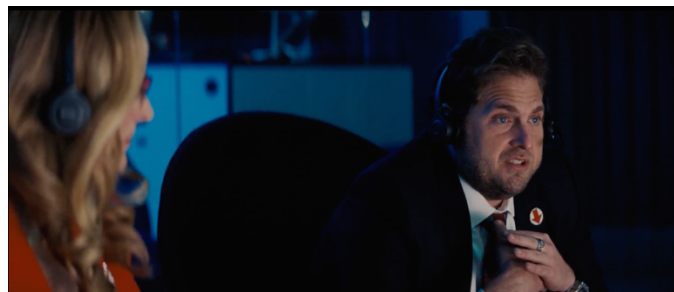
meaningful deliberation, but engagement. And the most effective means of engagement does not come from deliberation or logic; rather, it comes from emotive communication. In a sense, Randall's decision to engage conspiracy theories directly just adds fuel to the fire. Within this context, what Randall does online has another significance. He thinks he is aiding public knowledge, yet the context within which he is operating does not transform effort into clarity, but consumes his contributions and reinserts them into the same loop. His engagement instead sustains the system that produces falsehoods in the first place, rather than correcting the spread of falsehoods.

4.3.6 A Society Built to Not Know

By the time that comet, the size of Mount Everest, was finally visible to the naked eye in the sky, this film had already succeeded in proving that public ignorance does not come from people being stupid or too lazy to seek out information for themselves. Instead, this ignorance is conceptualized as a structural problem deliberately constructed by the media ecosystem and the social conditions in which they live. From the bureaucratic corridors of the White House to statistical reports on CVN, the "Don't Look Up" political campaign stage, to the buzz of conspiracy theories on Diddy and the heated debates on Patriot News, the film consistently reveals the same ironic pattern. The public is not being kept in the dark, facts about the comet are everywhere, even by looking up. However the system we have, quietly and not so quietly, nudges them to forget that fact.

This is precisely what Schudson (2008) means by stating that the excess of information becomes pointless when there is no cultural and social environment

conducive to critical thinking. As portrayed in *Don't Look Up* (2021), today's society reveals its nature to us: The media system favors distraction rather than enlightenment, politics thrives on the polarization and separation of the masses, while social media algorithms are crafted in such a way as to strip humans of their attention. Jason Orlean's speech during the opening ceremony of the BASH launch facility which, in reality, glorifies the wealth of commodities proves how severe a case of consumerism-driven distraction we are suffering from before the destruction of our planet begins. In the end, the film offers a sharp message that in the post-truth era, public ignorance continues not because truth has been lost but because the existing system systematically inundates the public sphere with entertainment, sensationalism, and emotional drama that drown out a shared understanding of reality.



Picture 4.51 *Jason at the BASH Launch Center*

(Don't Look Up, 2021, 1.51.40 – 1.52.10)

- Orlean : *“Do you want to say something too?”*
Jason : *“Yeah. What up, world? Jason Orlean, Chief of Staff. United States. I’ve been noticing a lot of prayers recently for people during this time, and I commend that. But I also wanna give a prayer for stuff. There’s dope stuff, like material stuff. Like sick apartments and cars and clothes and shit.”*

Even at the last minute, seconds before the comet hits, public opinion is still driven by image and consumption. Jason's speech is not about survival, or about a

crisis of the collective. It's not that, it's about self-image, material desires, as if there's still an audience to be enthralled. It appeared to be incongruous with its surroundings but within its setting it was made to look like business as usual. Here, ignorance cannot be equated to apathy. Here is the result of a situation where a system continually places distraction, surface-level achievements, and interaction above reflection and understanding one another. The point is not exaggerated here. In fact, it is explicitly highlighted in order for the audience to clearly understand the extent to which it is ingrained in our actions.