

# **Is YouTube History an Effective tool for Teaching History to Secondary Schoolers?**

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## 1. Introduction

Back in secondary school, I have often heard fellow pupils qualify history as an uninteresting subject, even something unneeded and incomprehensible. A fact which certainly stuck with me both throughout this period of my life and afterwards. And even years later, I can still witness this sentiment in adults, making political, economic and social decisions without considering how much such decisions are shaped by their past and by historical events. This is not a new problem either, as shown by students back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also expressing neutral or negative opinions towards their social studies subjects, history being part of which.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question as to why this is the case. One possible explanation could be that because educational systems in general do not do enough to portray history as something useful or entertaining that young students should care about leave large swaths of people not innately interested in the topic left completely out. Supporting this hypothesis, in the burgeoning sphere of online historical content, under various documentaries, people can often be seen reminiscing how historical education during their time in school or even on dedicated historical channels on TV did not present information in a nearly as interesting manner.<sup>234</sup>

However, if there is one thing to be taken from the abovementioned, it is that the relevance of history is evident – people expressing interest, desire for knowledge, or understanding of the past both in the comments of said videos and beyond. Nevertheless, in the closing decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the belief that the “End of History” (Fukuyama, 1992) had arrived and thus dominated the historical-political discourse until was recently shattered.<sup>5</sup> Modern-day events, such as the recent invasion of Russia in Ukraine, are to be understood against a historical background, which over the half a year of its undergoing has left a drastic mark on the political<sup>6</sup>, economic<sup>7</sup>, and societal<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schug. 1984. *Why kids don't like social studies*.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly. 2021. *The Entire History of the Akkadians // Ancient Mesopotamia Documentary*

<sup>3</sup> Kelly. 2020. *The Sea Peoples & The Late Bronze Age Collapse // Ancient History Documentary (1200-1150 BC)*

<sup>4</sup> Kelly. 2021 *After Rome - The War For Britain // History Documentary*

<sup>5</sup> Cohen. 2009. *After the End of History : American Fiction in the 1990s*.

<sup>6</sup> Nato. 2022. *Finland and Sweden complete NATO accession talks*

<sup>7</sup> Liadze, Macchiarelli, Mortimer-Lee, Sanchez Juanino. 2022. *The economic costs of the Russia-Ukraine conflict*.

<sup>8</sup> Steffen, Patt. 2022. *A historical turning point? Early evidence on how the Russia-Ukraine war changes public support for clean energy policies*.

trends across the globe. Both elements will undoubtedly leave an impact on the course of human history influencing the world in which future generations will live.

History is not a topic about long-gone events and people, discussed only in dusty books and boring classrooms, which needs to be learned for learning's sake, but an ongoing process leaving a mark on modern-day events and impacting our day-to-day lives. As such, the question of how history can be presented in a way which conveys its importance and gets more people interested, stands. This paper will aim to explore one way of doing this, through the burgeoning sphere of documentaries produced and uploaded on online video sharing sites; more concretely YouTube.com by answering the following question:

*Is the quality of YouTube history channels sufficient to be an effective tool for teaching history to secondary schoolers?*

To do so it will also ask a number of secondary questions, namely:

1. What are history channels?
2. What is the quality of sourcing in historical YouTube videos and how can it be improved?
3. How accurate and detailed is the information presented?
4. What are the benefits of using YouTube videos in a classroom setting?
5. What are the logistical elements of running a historical channel?
6. How do these elements influence the quality, quantity, and topics presented?

A specific point will be made towards the second to last question as even the best researched information will not be of use if its intended audience is unable to engage with it due to the quality of the presentation. A 2020 study<sup>10</sup> examined this very concept in the sphere of YouTube videos as a means to educate and discovered that 41% of the students interviewed showed high enjoyment from developing their listening skills through this medium, while further 38% were neutral on it. This goes to show that the implementation YouTube clips in language education is perceived as at least helpful by this group of students. Therefore, it is possible to explore further whether this apparent, if limited, showing of benefit could lead to a potential new way to increase student

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<sup>10</sup> Pratama, Arifin, Widianingsih. 2020. *The use of youtube as a learning tool in teaching listening skill.*

engagement in history education. Additionally, the earlier mentioned comments about people reminiscing about YouTube documentary quality as opposed to TV or school one can be given as examples of further, yet unstructured evidence towards this point.

Furthermore, the concise and engaging educational material published online easily condenses and presents large amounts of information in a small amount of time. It opens up time for teachers in the sense that they are able to play already made videos instead of needing to develop personal maps or examples to convey the same information. This is corroborated by the Arizona State University who published on their own website their vision of how and why YouTube content can be used in an academic environment.<sup>11</sup> Alongside echoing the previous research's findings that video content can help students get better involved in the studying process, they also discuss the ease of use for teachers, the ease of use for students and the financial aspects of producing classroom-worthy documentaries, including how content on YouTube compares to full length, "Hollywood-worthy videos". This low production cost also presents teachers with the ability to make videos of their own, which has already happened with several examples being given later in this paper.

### **1.1.Relevance**

The element of social relevance is also one to be considered in regard to the use of online video content in classrooms. A saying often attributed to Mark Twain stating "History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes"<sup>12</sup> is a good example of why historical education is important. Examples of this can be seen as throughout history: one being the various Roman armies being ambushed and destroyed throughout the centuries, from Carrhae<sup>13</sup> to Trajan's Gate<sup>14</sup> and beyond – all being different but sharing the common characteristic of failed reconnaissance leading to a catastrophe. There are far more ambushes that occurred for very similar reasons, there are also many other aspects of the past which show such correlations<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, showing students the importance of history as a "critically constructed collective memory"<sup>16</sup>, as per the words of William H. MacNeill,

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<sup>11</sup> Arizona State University. *Benefits of using YouTube for your online education*.

<sup>12</sup> Quoteresearch. 2022. *History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes*.

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch. *The Life of Crassius*

<sup>14</sup> Zlatarski. 1937. *History of the Bulgarian state*.

<sup>15</sup> Charters, Houlemare, Wilson, eds. 2020. *A Global History of Early Modern Violence*.

<sup>16</sup> McNeill. 1985. *Why study history?*

is paramount to preparing them for the world and what they can expect to see in the future. While it is impossible to know what said world would look like, much inspiration for handling it may be harnessed from unique yet similar events to those characterising humanity's past.

In this context the YouTube historian enter the stage with goal to provide good quality historical contend for the wider public to watch and enjoy. However, because of this they may also have the ability and quality to provide easily accessible information to students in the classroom. Unfortunately, there has been little to no research done in this field as YouTube content has not been a formal inclusion into educational programs, with singular teachers choosing to incorporate it in a variety of ways. And the little research that has been done on how these videos effect education has not been about historical topics. As a result, this paper can be seen as one of the first propositions for a further exploration into the usage of these measures in such a role, and particularly in a historical context.

## **2. Methodology**

Before discussing anything in regards to the quality of historical education through YouTube, one must first establish what good historical education is. It is in essence the ability of the system to provide students with the sufficient knowledge to understand and use history in a variety of situations<sup>17</sup>. More specifically, students should have enough base knowledge of historical subjects to be able to paint a picture of humanity's past even if they are not versed in detail in the topics. They should have the ability to then take historical facts and to be able to understand the reasons for their happening, the effects they had on humanity or other events and the consequences of these events on the present<sup>18</sup>. Additionally, this means that they not only need to be able to discuss historical topics but also the uncertainty that can come from fragments, excavations, and partial descriptions upon which our knowledge of the past is built; this includes all the biases and propaganda in it<sup>19</sup>. In this regard teachers can be considered the cornerstone of education as they are the ones interacting with students and the ones directly responsible for providing them with the appropriate information and the abilities to discuss said information.

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<sup>17</sup> Tew. 2014. *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches*.

<sup>18</sup> Tew. 2014. *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches*.

<sup>19</sup> Williams. 2016. *Teaching History: Effective Teaching for Learning History - Chronological Vs. Thematic Approaches to Student Historical Comprehension*.

For this paper's case, it will consider YouTubers as teachers or an extension to teachers in their attempt to do their jobs. Therefore, this methodological section will first examine the world of YouTube historians, namely who they are and what constitutes a historical YouTube channel. The definition for the latter will be provided in order to separate them from ones who merely happen to contain historical elements or topics in their content. This will also be done by using the YouTubers discussed in this paper as examples for the definition. These YouTubers will also be examined one by one by looking at the structure of their channels, including who is behind them and to a smaller degree the background these creators come from to examine the content creators to assess the reliability of the YouTube channel.

The paper will then move on to the quality of selected YouTube history channels. This it will do by trying to establish what constitutes a good historical video is. It will examine several categories such as proper sourcing, and in connection, whether the research is up-to-standard. It will also look at these channels' ability to portray information. The goal for doing this is to examine if YouTube can be an effective tool to teach at a secondary education level with special emphasis placed on being able to portray information in an appropriate way. Additionally, being able to capture the attention of students helping them better get into the topic at hand is also paramount.

These two sides, the quality of content and the background of creators, will then be used to explore what makes a person qualified to operate a YouTube channel with the intent of using it as an educational platform. To do so, the paper will follow through several steps in determining the quality:

1. The ability of a creator to present information in an interesting manner. This will consist of 2 points – the technical quality of videos as a way to provide clear and readable visuals and audio to viewers and the speaker's oratory abilities to plainly yet enthrallingly present information.
2. The accuracy of the information presented. Educational YouTubers, not only in the historical field, style their videos as documentaries or investigations into various topics. In order for this content to effectively stand up to the definition of "documentary" they must be properly researched. As such, this point can easily be seen as the most important element as it pertains to the suitability of the videos to be educational. Without this requirement being fulfilled, no other would matter.

3. The sourcing of these videos. This element can be seen as a continuation of the requirement for well researched content. Providing viewers with an adequate description of the primary and secondary sources used to create these videos, allows them the ability to ensure that the quality is good and additionally allow them to look further into the topics since a 10-20-minute video cannot compare to the deep insight of primary sources and literature used in it can provide. Additionally, under this graph can be placed further reading suggested by creators as a way to provide interested viewers with additional information.

4. The selection of historical topics and how representative that selection is for history in its entirety. Namely, the Eurocentricity that can be seen in many channels, the large focus on military history and great men, and the depiction of some of the darker elements of human history alongside other smaller elements. The goal is to explore whether the content put out by these channels makes sure to portray their topics in an equal and balanced manner, especially in the case of wars, colonial or religiously motivated conflict or others.

5. The logistics of producing YouTube educational content. From the creation and research aspect to copyright problems caused by a variety of factors, including some topics being deemed too sensitive or inflammatory to be promoted on the website, and the following financial and discoverability/availability aspects stemming from this process and hurdles. This potential shadow-banning of content on the platform will be connected to the type of videos which are ultimately produced and the way any sensitive information is presented in them. Furthermore, by looking at these financial aspects, it will be possible to then explore and illustrate the reasons why this content is available for free on a public platform as well as the content quality aspects which come with attempting to keep such channels alive and thriving.

All aforementioned steps will be applied to a selection of channels that will serve as examples for the different niches and nuances of both said channels and the historical YouTube community in general. As the entire community of creators is far too large to be discussed in this paper, it will be required to select these examples on the basis on their specific capabilities, niches or unique elements which facilitate the discussion best. While the reasons for selection will be expanded upon in the start of each section regarding a selected creator, here they will be listed and a

description of why they were chosen will be provided further bellow: Kings and Generals, Invicta, Pete Kelly, Voices of the Past.

### **3. Thesis Framework**

These elements include: an explanation of what good history education is, an critical assessment of current history education methods, and a description of what good historical YouTubers are, including the elements which their videos comprise of – predominant content fields and ways of video structure. Finally, this section will present a list of the creators selected to be discussed, as well as the reasons why. With the exponential growth of the YouTube history field over the last 6-7 years it would be impossible to discuss all creators involved, even when in some examples there can be found many unique and discussion-worth elements.

#### **3.1.What is history?**

By a strict definition<sup>20</sup>, history is purely the field of study which aims to cover all events of the past, especially those of the human past. Usually history is considered to be the time after humanity’s discovery of writing; all before is labelled prehistory<sup>21</sup>. However, it can be said that history is much more than that – it also leaves a cultural impact on generations following those in whose lives the events unfolded<sup>22</sup>.

#### **3.2.Presenting accurate information**

History requires accurate and objective information. However, historians are always products of their time. This means that they are naturally fallible due to their own biases and the inability of humans to be all knowing and seeing. As such historians need to reflect upon their own position in order to locate and remove as many such possible problems as possible.

As with other scientific fields, humanity strives to better our understanding of the world around us, its past present and future, by attempting to get the most accurate approximation of what happened in the past.<sup>23</sup> The popular saying “history is written by the winners” in combination with the visible use of propaganda by civilisations, countries and societies

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<sup>20</sup> History – Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>21</sup> Souvatzi, A. Baysal, E. Baysal, eds. 2019. *Time and History in Prehistory*.

<sup>22</sup> Morton. 2011. *The Routledge Companion to Music and Visual Culture*.

<sup>23</sup> Singer. 2013. *'The Goal of History', Marx: A Very Short Introduction*.

throughout the centuries affects the way people view the pasts of their lands, even down to the idea of the states and nationalities<sup>24</sup>.

This is but a single example of how history can be twisted to present itself in a certain manner, in order to support different ideologies. Sometimes such ideologies, based in history, can be incredibly harmful, the Holocaust being a specifically grizzly case, or largely mundane yet misleading<sup>27</sup>. Ensuring that the most accurate information is collected and presented minimises the chances of human bias, even if unintentionally, influencing the way history is taught. To do so historians and archaeologists employ thorough source analysis, with the goal of new information to be consistently unearthed and transcribed in order to provide a more accurate picture of the past<sup>28</sup>. The collection of high amounts of data is done to minimize the chance of misinterpreting events by having a too singular point of knowledge such as in cases where only one side of the accounts is available, such as with civilisations who had developed writing portraying their neighbours who had not. In such situations scholars usually tread on the side of caution as they do not want to misrepresent events:

In short, it can be considered to be a form of triangulation. What data is available is examined – pottery, weapons, jewellery, and other items excavated about the described culture. Then external descriptions of them are evaluated, comparing one to the other and if the information and outcomes are extensive enough this gives researchers enough certainty to be able to piece together the most plausible, or a couple of prevalent theories about events. Additionally, this way any misinformation because of propaganda, lack of knowledge or understanding of the culture by the original writer, or other inaccuracies can be spotted and determined as such<sup>29</sup>. Lastly, there is the need to remain open to all future discoveries on the matter. Historians must be aware that any loosely documented topics might emerge in the future as false, thus they must always be ready to examine and accept the changes to better our

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<sup>24</sup> Shamila, Huzen. 2020. *Propaganda Through the Ages, Classical Studies*.

<sup>27</sup> Bauman. 1989. *The Uniqueness and Normality of the Holocaust*. p. 83-116.\*

<sup>28</sup> Kipping, et al. 2013. *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*.

<sup>29</sup> Trevelyan. 1947. *Bias in History*.

understanding of the past – a need that is in cases not followed through, leading to false knowledge being propagated for long periods of time before being finally corrected<sup>30</sup>.

### **3.3. Analysis of Time and the Similarities Through History**

It is important to state that history is not only about presenting accurate information but also understanding the past and why events took and take place<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, drawing conclusions from historical information can lead to serious purposeful or not misinterpretation of events which is why this section is prefaced with this fact. One of the best human examples is that of the Holocaust during the Second World War; history being twisted to justify beliefs and actions<sup>32</sup>. This is a warning that all examples given below should be examined with this in mind and that history should not entail an automatic answer to one's questions or a justification for action.

With this prefaced, the second example of historical importance can be summarised with the already referenced saying that history does not repeat itself but rhymes. This quote has already been mentioned in the paper before but it bears repeating that humanity, through the ages, even with the advancement of societies and technology, still retains the same base characteristics and similarities of human behaviour, as we did in ages past<sup>33</sup>. Thus, many of the issues and events we face can be seen, to one degree or other, in the past. This is incredibly useful as it provides us with insight on how to handle these events. A case for this would be the recent Covid-19 pandemic which shook the world. A century earlier, humanity was once again hit by plague, namely the Spanish flu, influenza. Then similar patterns of human behaviour could be seen with peaks and lows of infections and with people increasing and decreasing restrictions<sup>34</sup>. Restrictions would be lowered and people would go out only for the cycle to repeat. Nowadays, the same thing happened with the Covid pandemic with measures being lowered only for a new wave to come<sup>35</sup>. Whether humanity learned from this previous epidemic and whether the

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<sup>30</sup> Alfleesy. 2019. *Why the wrong scientific theories are not corrected and re-evaluated again by Scientists* Corresponding Author

<sup>31</sup> Tew. 2014. *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches*.

<sup>32</sup> Lang. 2005. *Post-Holocaust : Interpretation, Misinterpretation, and the Claims of History. Jewish Literature and Culture*.

<sup>33</sup> Hodgson. 2012. *The Consequences of Human Behavior*.

<sup>34</sup> Beach, et al. 2020. *The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and Its Lessons for Covid-19*.

<sup>35</sup> Shimul, et al. 2021. "Effect of easing lockdown and restriction measures on COVID-19 epidemic projection: A case study of Saudi Arabia." *Plos one* 16, no. 9: e0256958.

management of either of them was handled well is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the resemblance cannot be denied.

What can be seen in the pandemic example is that such patterns can be observed in history and a good education should attempt to illustrate such correlations to students in order to point to them the patterns and similarities that can be found in the past. Alternatively, it can present them with sufficient information and encourage them to logically think about these topics in order to not only reach conclusions by themselves but also be able to take better informed decisions.

### **3.4. History Education**

In order to establish and understand what historical education is Daniel Tew's, in his "Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic approaches" will be observed. In it he discusses three following methods for teaching history and examines their effectiveness: the chronological, the thematic and the combined method.

#### **3.4.1. The Chronological Approach**

The Chronological approach of teaching history, according to Tew, is the older of the two main approaches in modern historical education.<sup>37</sup> The reason for it is likely because of how humans perceive history naturally<sup>38</sup>. When one is questioned about an occurrence, the natural way in which most humans would answer is to sort events in order of how they happened and begin narrating them from the earliest relevant – in other words, to go in a chronological order. It is thus possible to see how it arose and why it gained popularity, remaining the prevalent approach until today<sup>39</sup>. It could be considered the natural way of talking about past events. In books, the stories begin at the start and end with the conclusion of a period in history. In the same manner so do the historical periods humanity has defined. As such, in the chronological approach historical developments can be seen as having a start and a logical finish (e.g., Rise and fall of Rome). According to Tew, this has an added benefit of giving teachers the ability to easily structure their courses since each lesson or group of lessons can easily be separated into its own topic and discussed as such. Less preparation time and more importantly, a clear structure, can

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<sup>37</sup> Tew. 2014. *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches*.

<sup>38</sup> Williams. 2016. *Teaching History: Effective Teaching for Learning History - Chronological Vs. Thematic Approaches to Student Historical Comprehension*.

<sup>39</sup> Tew. 2014. *Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches*.

then translate into more time being able to be allocated to exploring the lesson topics. Additionally, because of this structure they are more specific and contained in nature, allowing teachers and students to delve into them and in a clear way examine the details of these events. As such, the chronological approach offers a robust straightforwardness to education which focuses on presenting ample information for students to learn and then use in their own time later in time. This is another one of the reasons detailed in Tew's work about why it was able to establish itself as the predominant teaching method in the historical field.

### **3.4.2. The Thematic Approach**

This leads into the second way of teaching history in modern schools – the thematic approach. It focuses more on discussing themes to get an in-depth understanding of them<sup>40</sup>. To do so effectively, it does away with the rigid chronological approach and brings examples from across history for teaching, and presenting information through discussion and these connections<sup>41</sup>. For example, a topic such as the history of art cannot be properly tackled through the chronological approach due to how much inspiration and influence creators drew from one another<sup>42</sup>. Following a strict chronological narrative would not allow for the exploration of such connections between artists and thus severely limit the depth of understanding. Contrary to this, students following the Thematic principles can examine different art pieces, the connections between them, and the inspirations and affects they had on one another; a fact especially relevant if one is to subscribe to the death of the author idea<sup>43</sup>. Some pieces of art, even though created by different people, would have common connections, and even create narratives – for example, religious frescos depicting continuous scenes from holy texts despite being created over exceptionally large periods of time, in many different places, and by many different authors. Students discussing these subjects would also benefit from exploring them either personally or in groups, being able to then get different perspectives and ideas together to better their understanding.

### **3.4.3. The Mixed Approach**

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<sup>40</sup> Tew. 2014. Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches.

<sup>41</sup> Tew. 2014. Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches.

<sup>42</sup> Tew. 2014. Pedagogy of Teaching History: Comparing the Chronologic and Thematic Approaches.

<sup>43</sup> Barthes. 2001. The death of the author, 1968.

In the section about thematic approach, some of the downsides of the problems of the Chronological approach were discussed; predominantly the rigidity. It is clear that neither approach is perfect – the chronological one can be described as very rigid, focused on transmitting information and the chains of events which unfolded. These things then students need to learn and then recreate or explain on a test. On the opposite side, the thematic approach does away with the structure of chronology. While this allows for topics to be better discussed by allowing for more comparisons and more debating between students, it can leave many of the without a good enough structure to understand the continuity of history, therefore nullifying any benefits they may have had otherwise. As such, a question in regard to correcting this arises. As an answer to it Tew has another idea – a third method, the Mixed one:

It is a combination of the other two approaches and focuses on selecting the best elements of either without doing away with either structure completely. This means that for example while a teacher might opt to structure their lessons in a chronological manner, where students are provided with ample, ordered information, they may also dedicate various amounts of time to discussions and to building connections between topics and cultural, societal and other motifs. These discussions could also help connect figures and influences vastly separated by time that would otherwise be missed, if a singular chronological approach is to be employed. To him the goal is to give students the ability to discuss and connect topics in order to better establish their understanding of the connections in historical events, a goal that can be best achieved by mixing the methods. This way Tew says that in his experience as a teacher he was best able to get to students; by relying on the flexibility and ability to better adapt to different audiences.

### **3.5.Challenges of History Education**

With the methods for studying history being explained above, it is time to explore the downsides to current historical education, some already mentioned in this paper:

#### **3.5.1. Great Figures and the Underrepresentation of Social History**

The first point of issue are the great figures of history. It is possible to say that across earth<sup>44</sup> and not just in western education the majority of what is discussed in history classes can often be brought down to what a small selection of important historical persons spearheaded or

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<sup>44</sup> Van Klinken. 2001. *The battle for history after Suharto: beyond sacred dates, great men, and legal milestones.*

achieved, leaving a mark on society<sup>45</sup>. It is not to say that this is a purely bad fact; it in fact teaches pupils about the biggest shapers of our world. However, it does create a problem where education is so focused on these individuals that they then cannot immerse themselves in the civilisations from before and gain a deeper understanding of the everyday reality of what the world looked like. They are thus left knowing only about the unusual, world changing events. This is often due to the fact that despite a well-structured curriculum, there is far too much to be told in a set number of classes, which are often not numerous or long enough to go through the “important” events in detail. This means that normal people’s lives are discussed, it is almost always done in brief and in the context of other events, thus ignoring largely what they looked like<sup>46</sup>. This can cause a disconnect in students from the world they are learning about. The natural discussion model of the thematic approach is useful in this situation as shown in the examples during its outlying, however, this may still not prove sufficient in the light of how it often is not taught in the normal material covered in the course. Consequently, most discussions on such topics can prove highly tangential or derived from the context of discussions; guesswork to a degree. Naturally, this means that students do not get to learn about many crucial aspects of history and may thus still believe old myths such as that the barbarians Rome warred and traded with were nothing but unwashed, half-dressed savages<sup>47</sup>. While the current idea may not be so caricaturistic, their cultures are still often seen as somehow subpar or worse, more unsophisticated than that of the Romans. This more detailed depiction of normal life is a fact that some YouTube channels have discussed a lot of and will thus be talked more about below.

### **3.5.2. Reproduction of facts and dates**

A second element is that history education sometimes is descriptive in nature and limits itself to fact sharing and memorization of dates.<sup>48</sup> Many times, what is important is that students are able to score well on the test and as such, they need to learn their material and reproduce it, including specific dates<sup>49</sup>. This approach might impair students’ ability to learn things since they are too focused on memorizing facts rather than understanding the subject material. This is at the

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<sup>45</sup> Boring. 1950. *Great men and scientific progress*.

<sup>46</sup> Port. 2015. "History from below, the history of everyday life, and microhistory.": 108-113.

<sup>47</sup> Gruen. 2020. *Ethnicity in the Ancient World Did It Matter?* Chapter 1 “Were Barbarians Barbaric?”.

<sup>48</sup> Obeidat et al. 2011. *The effect of students' reluctance of studying history on their level of historical culture*.

<sup>49</sup> Zukan, and Aldulaimi. 2020. *The Influence of Grade Expectation and Student Motivation for Academic Performance*.

expense of allowing pupils to participate in the discourse and learn more through this channel<sup>50</sup>. It is in fact another issue which the mixed method aims to relieve by giving students the platform and ability to focus more on discussing, understanding, and explaining, in addition to learning information alone.

### **3.5.3. Lack of time in the curriculum/rushing**

Teachers experience problems with timing and being able to present all the information they are supposed to<sup>51</sup>. Due to the scope of history as a field it is not possible for students to be taught even a small section of all the information available. Consequently, even a lot of the major events are forced to be glossed over or left out, or treated superficially. Tew also is concerned by this fact when describing the chronological system. The effects, however, are what must be looked at here in more detail – the skipping of information can lead to distorted image of global history and misrepresentation of cultural particularities. + selection of topics might be biased. Due to the time restraints teachers may need to rapidly go from topic to topic and from period to period. Students therefore might not be given apt descriptions of events or the relations between states or individuals, meaning that they thus may be required to understand large periods of time with little information provided, potentially even skewing their perception of the timeline.

Another major issue that stems from this the problem of Euro-centrism and West-centrism in education<sup>52</sup>. This paper, while focusing on western education, has made a point so far of using western examples almost entirely in order to illustrate the defaultism which can be observed when discussing and teaching history. Due to the often-apparent speed with which teachers need to cover material in order to follow the curriculum, as illustrated in the previous paragraph, this becomes a rapidly apparent issue. The end result is that these students are then left with this extremely small worldview on events with entire areas of the world left almost undiscussed outside of the colonial perspective. Please refer to recent attempts to remedy this eurocentrism: decolonizing the curriculum.

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<sup>50</sup> Obeidat et al. 2011. *The effect of students' reluctance of studying history on their level of historical culture.*

<sup>51</sup> Davis. 2017. *History Teachers' Perspectives of Time Constraints, Engagement, and Relevance in the Curriculum.*

<sup>52</sup> *Eurocentrism and Academic Imperialism.* 2011.

Alternatively, there is the problem of eurocentrism propagating false information or even creating false idea of what areas or other culture look like – the creation of Orientalism<sup>53</sup>, the discourse around colonialism and the inherently linked racism<sup>54</sup> and others. Another horrifying example for this twisting of history precisely is the Holocaust – a whole people being turned into nothing more than barbaric animals in the eyes of a nation<sup>55</sup>. By not teaching students about multiple points of view, the door is opened for not only simplifications but for these aspects as well to be overlooked.

### **3.6.Application**

An issue with historical education, as stated before, is the fact that some students do not see the purpose for studying it<sup>56</sup>. It appears as a collection of facts and events that they are forced to learn while seeing no real-world application to them or the importance to them. Through this a decline of importance in historical education can be noticed<sup>57</sup>. Students everywhere share the goal of achieving the highest grades possible with the goal of being able to use these results in their lives outside of school. This idea can be deduced from the fact that the purpose of the modern educational system is to prepare pupils for their adult life, especially in a societal and professional aspect<sup>5859</sup>. Therefore, for many students the inadequate connection of history to its everyday application has proven to be a problem<sup>60</sup>. A large contributor to this has been inadequate action from educators in regards to engaging pupils to the topics, allowing them to discuss, participate, or even have a series of events be well summarised<sup>61</sup>. In addition to this, I would also like to present a personal observation. It may not provide a wide-scale example, but only one pertaining to Bulgarian historical education, nevertheless it is an important observation of what students not being engaged by their teachers can lead to:

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<sup>53</sup> Amin. 1989. *Eurocentrism*. pp. 124–125

<sup>54</sup> Araújo, and Maeso. 2015. *The Contours of Eurocentrism : Race, History, and Political Texts*.

<sup>55</sup> Arendt 1961). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. pp. 118-139.\*

<sup>56</sup> Obeidat et al. 2011. *The effect of students' reluctance of studying history on their level of historical culture*.

<sup>57</sup> Christou. 2009. *Gone but not forgotten: The decline of history as an educational foundation*.

<sup>58</sup> Uddin. *Meaning, Purpose, function and Morality of Education: An Overview of National Education Policy-2010 of Bangladesh*

<sup>59</sup> McNeill. 1985. *Why study history?*

<sup>60</sup> Vo et al., 2020. *Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school*

<sup>61</sup> Vo et al., 2020. *Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school*

All through middle- and high school I would see other students, including ones from different schools and even towns, expressing the idea that history is useless in a professional field, save for law or things narrowed down to historical work only. As professional realisation is always a concern, this pushed students away from the field and subsequently knowledge of it, as they tried to focus on the “important” ones. This is also a problem, and the goal is to show students why they needn’t only learn history for a job but that they can learn much from it in general, as per all the examples given above. To reverse this and interest students once more, it is paramount to get them interested in the topic and from there on to show them its applications.

Teachers are the primary element in this endeavour as they are the ones who interact most with students<sup>62</sup>. Good teachers should be able to provide the information in a way that would both give students a way to learn the facts of history and to engage with it. The most important element is flexibility – different classrooms and students have different needs to facilitate their learning, therefore teachers should always be ready to take in feedback and to adjust to best match the environment<sup>63</sup>; this includes the adjustment of teachers from transferring historical information to engaging students and allowing them to get engaged with the topic<sup>64</sup>. Educators should build a curriculum which allows enough time for discussion, reiterating of information already provided, and spare time for any changes during the course of the classes due to feedback. This would directly erase many of the biggest complains raised by students in the above-referenced research<sup>65</sup>. The side effect of this is that in the already full schedules of history classes, there would be even less time to cover a multitude of topics. Unfortunately, providing a solid case as to how history education can be changed on an institutional level, in order to provide teachers with more time, falls beyond the scope of this paper. What must be said however, is that in this case YouTube channels may serve as either a form of useful, further information, a way to engage students or an in-class helping tool. This observation comes in relation to one of the concerns this paper<sup>66</sup> raised – that teachers did not utilise modern, technological or other methods enough to facilitate the learning process.

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<sup>62</sup> Vo et al., 2020. *Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school*

<sup>63</sup> Boadu. 2015. *Effective teaching in history: The Perspectives of History Student-Teachers.*

<sup>64</sup> Boadu. 2015. *Effective teaching in history: The Perspectives of History Student-Teachers.*

<sup>65</sup> Vo et al., 2020. *Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school*

<sup>66</sup> Vo et al., 2020. *Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school*

## 4. What is a YouTube history channel?

In order to delve into the quality and execution of these channels, one must first look at what a history channel is. All profiles on YouTube are channels, however, the ones usually called “channels” by its users are those who post content<sup>67</sup>. Therefore, historical YouTube channels are those that focus on historical topics. Some focus entirely on a specific element of history, some on the other hand also have other content, not restricted to historical topics. They will also be referred here as channels who also include history or history-including channels. As for the first group of these two, this is but a really wide overview of what they can do in the many historical subfields. Below are a few; a reader is well to consider that these sub groups are not exclusive and that while some channels specialise in a single one, do not and thus can fall into several of these distinctions:

### 4.1.Key areas of historical YouTube/variety

#### 4.1.1. Military Topics

Military topics are one of the main elements of historical YouTube channels. Human history is deeply intertwined with war<sup>68</sup>. As such many viewers want to learn about the great battles and generals that shaped our past. These can be about the oldest recorded conflicts or even modern ones. What these YouTubers usually do is describe the events leading up to the battle, the armies, their positioning and then the battles themselves, finishing with a short conclusion of the aftermath. It is important to mention that this structure can be expanded to the level of whole wars, with singular battles being discussed in a chronological order, as the events occur.<sup>69</sup>

When talking about military topics on the platform, it is important to state that they are a popular form of historical content because they draw in large amounts of viewers, as shown by some of the biggest channels, such as Kings and Generals<sup>70</sup> (one of the channels discussed in this

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<sup>67</sup> Karch. 2021. *What Is a YouTube Channel?*

<sup>68</sup> Roach. 2016. *Grunt: The Curious Science of Humans at War*

<sup>69</sup> Examples of such battles include:

Kings and Generals. 2022. *Megiddo 1457 BC - Oldest Battle in History - Bronze Age Documentary.*

Kings and Generals. 2022. *Battle of Hydaspes 326 Bc - Conquests of Alexander the Great Documentary.*

Invicta. 2016. *Battle of Ecnomus (256 Bc) - Largest Naval Battle in History.*

<sup>70</sup> *Kings and Generals.* YouTube.

paper), having a large part of their content be military in nature. A big reason for this is the interest people have in narratives as a means of learning things<sup>71</sup> and military history lending itself well to telling engaging stories of events which drastically changed local or world affairs<sup>72</sup>. While it is in no means the entirety of history, military history has proven multiple times to be a safe topic which draws in a viewership, urging creators to lean upon it. This however, will be explored in more detail later in this paper when discussing how, why, and influence viewers have on channels' topic selection.

#### **4.1.2. Cultural Topics**

Due to humans being social in nature, humanity and its way of life, interests, and manners are a normal interest as they allow us to better understand and fit into society<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there are YouTubers who discuss these topics – from art, culture, and food, to how children grew up in their times, pets or others, even the routes and diaries of merchants and travellers experiencing a world far away from their own. They attempt to put the small human stories into history, adding humanity in the process.<sup>74</sup>

#### **4.1.3. Fashion Topic**

While fashion can be viewed as a part of the cultural topic, however, it will be put in as a separate thing for a number of reasons – firstly, because fashion is a huge topic that can change wildly from period to period, and secondly because it goes to show that these specialised channels that were mentioned earlier can really specialise, going into details such as the way people kept and washed their garments.<sup>75</sup> These channels unfortunately fall beyond the scope of

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<sup>71</sup> Middlekauff. 1991. *Narrative History and Ordinary Life*

<sup>72</sup> Hanska. 2016. *Narrative Approach to the Art of War and Military Studies - Narratology As Military Science Research Paradigm*.

<sup>73</sup> Gross, and Vostroknutov. 2021. *Why Do People Follow Social Norms?*

<sup>74</sup> Examples of such cultural topics include:

Invicta. 2022. *What was it like to Grow Up Byzantine? Documentary*

Invicta. 2018. *How They Did It - Pet Dogs in Ancient Rome*.

Voices of the Past. 2020. *Marco Polo Describes the Mongols // 13th cent. Primary Source*.

<sup>75</sup> Examples of such fashion videos include:

Karolina Żebrowska. 2018. *Everything Wrong With Those "100 Years of..." Videos - Rant*.

Abby Cox. 2022. *I tried a 300-year-old hair care routine for a year & this is what I learned (it's awesome!)*.

Abby Cox. 2020. *I Wore 18th-Century Clothing \*Every Day for 5 Years & This Is What I Learned (Corsets Aren't Bad!)*.

this paper but are no less interesting both in regards to their content and to the learning and sometimes exploratory and research potential it provides.

#### **4.1.4. Judicial/Legal and Political Topics**

The legal and political aspects of history could be explained as how countries functioned. As such some channels also include content on political and legal structures throughout the ages, they discuss them not as a part of the ongoing events of the time but as structures, offices, laws, and the ways people perceived them, how they were upheld, etc. In short, they serve to give people an understanding of how societies and civilisations worked – *Invicta*<sup>76</sup> has many videos that tackle exactly these topics in their videos focused on societies through history. This will be discussed further in the paper but the judicial and political topics as such also serve to provide context for the other topics.

#### **4.2. Different types of channels: single-topic or broad**

With these possible topics being broadly laid out, it is important to discuss several aspects connected to them:

Firstly, there are specialised channels that go and discuss a single topic. They can range from singular countries and their histories, singular time periods, or singular cultural aspects (fashion being an example here that combines the last two). *Eastern Roman History*<sup>77</sup> and *Ottoman History Hub*<sup>78</sup> are two such channels which often collaborate due to the close relations between their respective channel topics.

Secondly, and on the contrary, most channels actually prefer to discuss many different areas and topics, not limiting themselves to a single one. This of course hampers the depth to which information can be presented.

#### **4.3. Areas of channels: Format**

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<sup>76</sup> *Invicta*. YouTube.

<sup>77</sup> *Eastern Roman history*. YouTube.

<sup>78</sup> *Ottoman history hub*. YouTube.

Before moving on to the channels discussed in this paper it is relevant to form the broad categories into which they can fall. For the purpose of this paper three will be established: the visual, the audio, and tour guide style content.

The first group, the visual, consists of channels which rely the heaviest on visual aspects such as maps, images, reconstructions of objects and others, related to the topics they discuss. The usual structure includes an overarching map, a battle map if applicable, and a variety of artworks to supplement the descriptions in the narrations<sup>79</sup>. On occasion, live footage can also be seen in this type of channels though it is an exception<sup>80</sup>.

The second channel group are channels which rely predominantly on audio to present the information needed. The visuals are either secondary or non-existent. By non-existent is meant that due to the structure of the YouTube platform, it is impossible to upload content without video footage in it so channels like these usually omit any detailed graphics and at most put stock images of relevant maps, artefacts, persons, clothes, etc. Additionally, they are not discussed like the footage in the video group, but serve merely as a backdrop for viewers to observe while they listen to the narration; a sort of visual aid<sup>81</sup>. When discussing historical persons, an image of them is occasionally displayed with their lifespan, reign, or other important dates<sup>82</sup>. Sometimes, to a small degree these visuals can be integrated into the video. This is done by the narration explicitly pointing out something that can be seen but they remain a rare one-time occurrence.

The third group of channels are the tour guides. These are less common than the other groups. What they do is focus on showing viewers practices or objects in their most authentic form available. This means that this type of content can see creators present in museums, archaeological ruins, dig sites or other<sup>83</sup>. It is not necessary that these videos are entirely in the form of a guide – often times they also contain vlog content type of structure. Alternatively,

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<sup>79</sup> Kings and Generals. 2019. *Why Was Egypt Crucial for the Roman Empire?*

Invicta. 2022. *True Size of a Roman Legion (3D) Documentary*.

Kings and Generals. 2022. *Maritsa 1371 - End of the Serbian Empire - Ottoman History Documentary*.

<sup>80</sup> Invicta. 2022. *How Did Roman Cataphracts Go To War? Documentary*.

<sup>81</sup> Voices of the Past. 2019. *Ancient Chinese Historian Describes The Roman Empire // 3rd century Ad "Weilüe" // Primary Source*.

<sup>82</sup> Pete Kelly. 2021. *'Greatest Archaeological Discovery in British History' - Visiting Sutton Hoo*.

<sup>83</sup> Pete Kelly. 2021. *'Greatest Archaeological Discovery in British History' - Visiting Sutton Hoo*.

these videos can see creators combining elements from the other types of videos before cutting to and from the live guided content that encompasses their core.

#### 4.4. Channels to be discussed

In this thesis, the following channels to be examined. Here are they with a short description for the reasons behind selecting each one:

**Kings and Generals**<sup>84</sup> – a visual channel, and also the biggest historical channel on the platform dealing with general military and economic history. They will be discussed due to their success as shown by their high viewership and subscriber numbers as well as because of the diversity of the topics discussed on it – military, economic, social, biographies and other, spread across history and the globe.

**Invicta**<sup>85</sup> – a visual channel. They differentiate themselves from Kings and Generals by exploring more mundane, normal-life topics or more specialised military ones. They will be explored both for the unique content and for the contrast with the first channel.

**Pete Kelly**<sup>86</sup> – a tour guide channel. It is the second channel of historical YouTuber Peter Kelly. It will be discussed for its tour guide vlogs and the plethora of news on developments in the historical field (from new discoveries to new technology).

**Voices of the Past**<sup>87</sup> – an audio channel. It emerged as a secondary channel from Pete Kelly's main channel, History Time. It is run by his brother David Kelly. In this paper it will be discussed because of its focus on presenting primary source historical literature.

#### 5. Kings and Generals

The first channel that is about to be discussed is Kings and Generals, the biggest historical channel currently on the YouTube platform, with 2.8 million subscribers at the time of writing<sup>88</sup>. As such, they will be talked about first. This will be done by looking at the five abovementioned criteria – The quality of information, sourcing, the appeal of the topics chosen

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<sup>84</sup> *Kings and Generals*. YouTube.

<sup>85</sup> *Invicta*. YouTube.

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, P. *Pete Kelly*. YouTube.

<sup>87</sup> Kelly, D. *Voices of the past*. YouTube.

<sup>88</sup> *Kings and Generals*. YouTube.

to be discussed, why these topics were chosen, and the logistics behind their channels. First however, the plural “channels” will be described by the history of their work.

### **5.1. Start/History of the Channel**

Kings and Generals (K&G) began their work in 2016 under a different name but quickly rebranded to their current one when they began uploading historical content in August 2017<sup>89</sup>. Also in 2017 a self-standing gaming YouTuber, OfficiallyDevin<sup>90</sup>, was taken onboard to be their narrator<sup>91</sup>. He has remained in that role since but has not engaged in any further way with content creation for K&G. In these early days their content was characterised by simple battlefield or map animations reminiscent simplified of military maps complimented by footage from the Total War series of games, which focused simulating historical battlefields with thousands of individual soldiers on them<sup>92</sup>. What this allowed them was a uniformity of visual, audio, and narrative style and the ability to easily discuss many varied topics from across human history.

Regardless of whether it did, the channel grew exponentially in the following years. This allowed them the opportunity to branch out and experiment with other topics which were not explicitly military in nature – ancient culture, philosophy, economics, episodes on certain persons, and others. Starting in 2018 they also began branching out into other channels, founding the Cold War channel which was entirely focused on its namesake period and all its sides<sup>93</sup>. In 2021 they would also start their fantasy channel, Wizards and Warriors, which covers various fantasy worlds in the exact same manner as the historical topics are on K&G<sup>94</sup>. By 2022 they also run several podcasts which can be found on audio streaming platforms or their website<sup>95</sup>. Lastly, over the years and with the expansion of their team and resources, they began to replace game visuals and roughly drawn maps with intricate hand-crafted art and maps for each and every new video.

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<sup>89</sup> *Kings and Generals*. Wikitubia.

<sup>90</sup> *OfficiallyDevin*. YouTube.

*Game World Narratives*. YouTube.

*OffyD's Game Grounds*. YouTube.

<sup>91</sup> *Kings and Generals*. Wikitubia.

<sup>92</sup> *Games*. Total War.

<sup>93</sup> *The Cold War*. YouTube.

<sup>94</sup> *Wizards and Warriors*. YouTube.

<sup>95</sup> *Kings and Generals*. Website.

## 5.2. Topics of videos

Kings and Generals' videos can be divided into several broad categories of videos, often separated into series which can be found under the playlist tab on their channel:

First, there are the standard military, battle tactic videos, the ones they began with. Even until today, this type of video is the backbone of their content. The usual structure is that of a prelude of the events leading up to the battle, it itself, and finally a short overview of the aftermath following it. In addition to it being the content style which started their channel, it has also transformed into a part of their long-running series. These series discuss entire periods of time, for example the Hundred Years War, in great detail, with each episode being one of these roughly 20-minute-long videos.

The second type of video are those who cover specific individuals or non-military events. They can vary greatly from biographies to the history of cities, or descriptions of travels, explorations or others. These videos are usually accompanied by the highest amount of art but are often standalones unlike their other content. Often times such videos come out when a current relative event occurs such as a video on Ukraine's history two months after the start of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war<sup>96</sup>. They allow them to explore and relate to the present these events and people, putting a spotlight on them in order to give viewers an in-depth view of the topic. It furthermore presents a more microscopic approach to the contents as opposed to the previous category's more general overview style.

The third video style category are the economic or cultural videos. A variety of concepts are discussed in said videos – regional economic factors, the way states taxed their citizens and how their bureaucracy worked, cultural norms and practices, discussion of specific topics such as Greek drama<sup>97</sup>. In their structure they usually a specificity of the topic with its general overview over an extended period of time. Often times citations of figures and incorporated, especially when discussing economic or census-related topics. Furthermore, these videos still attempt to provide an overview of a topic, so in case of the aforementioned example of Greek drama, they would focus on the field as opposed to specific authors and their works.

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<sup>96</sup> Kings and Generals. 2022. *Medieval Origins of Ukrainians - Project Ukraine - History Documentary*.

<sup>97</sup> Kings and Generals. *Ancient civilizations*.

### **5.3. Branching into New channels**

In the following section, K&G's branching out with their growth will be explored in order to raise several notable points about the use of these developments and their relation to the main channel and topics in it. The Kings and Generals creators run two more channels – The Cold War<sup>98</sup> and Wizards and Warriors<sup>99</sup>. The prior focuses on the Cold war period of history, exploring it systematically in depth, while the later transfers the usual content and style seen on K&G to fantasy and sci-fi. Wizards and Warriors can be seen as the more interesting of the two channels, for the purposes of this paper as it shows the overlap between history and fantasy, especially in regard to the human interest in learning about history through narratives<sup>100</sup> (and thus popular interest being in large parts upon military history and larger than life figures).

Nevertheless, these two channels predominantly illustrate the success and therefore financial stability of Kings and Generals which has allowed them to expand into other spheres and topics.

### **5.4. Five methods**

Now that the history and structure of Kings and Generals have been laid out, it is possible to examine their content in accordance to the five criteria for determining if they are a good source of information for historical education. The outlay of these criteria have been listed above.

#### **5.4.1. Interesting information**

The first criterium is in regards to whether the information is interestingly presented. On these aspects, as corroborated by their high viewership count and consistency, Kings and Generals appear to be performing well<sup>101</sup>. Their size and thus popularity being the first indicator for interestingly presented information. Due to the variety of content creators on the platform, viewers are able to easily leave videos of low quality or ones that are disinteresting. In this regard K&G also boast their aforementioned plethora of custom-made art and maps which have drastically improved over the years. Additionally, with the experience the team has gained, they

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<sup>98</sup> *The Cold War*. YouTube.

<sup>99</sup> *Wizards and Warriors*. YouTube.

<sup>100</sup> Middlekauff. 1991. *Narrative History and Ordinary Life*.

<sup>101</sup> *Kings and Generals' most recent YouTube videos*. SocialBlade.

have gradually and continuously refined the structure of videos in order to make them easier to follow while presenting as much information as possible.

Another aspect of their public appeal is the audio. Across the platform and its content niches creators repeat that in many aspects the audio quality is more important for viewer retention, assuming good, if not excellent video quality – even if the visuals are not of the highest order, viewers may remain for the content, yet a poor microphone or diction can destroy a video’s viewership<sup>102</sup>. As stated above, their narrator, OfficiallyDevin, is highly liked by the viewership as seen by the protests when he was replaced by the original scriptwriter of a now deleted video; only the reuploaded version of it exists with Devin as a narrator<sup>103</sup>. This incident occurred in 2018 when the channel was drastically smaller, below 1 million subscribers, and the narrator has not been changed since; a testament to the importance of audio quality and narration style to appeal to an audience. The Wizards and Warriors channel also has OfficiallyDevin as its sole narrator and The Cold War one has a different yet still consistent narrator to compliment the different video formats used on that channel. The consistency across them is the noteworthy element.

#### **5.4.2. Accuracy**

In the field of accuracy Kings and Generals make sure to research their videos by having the writers of each piece be also the ones who research it, as shown by them often answering questions in the video comments.

In case of the artwork, the content creators present the art team with historical information so that they are able to make it in the most accurate manner possible. This can be confirmed by comparing it to depictions of clothing, armour and other in encyclopaedias and academic papers<sup>104</sup>. Additionally, they insert a variety of smaller facts in their videos, that often do not have a major or direct impact on the overall sequence of events. An example would be the

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<sup>102</sup> Lift Video Production. 2019. *Why Good Audio is More Important Than Good Video!*

<sup>103</sup> Kings and Generals. 2018. *Rise of the Incan Empire*.

<sup>104</sup> Examples of videos and the ability to check for accuracy of illustration:

Kings and Generals. 2019. *Roman Army during the Crisis of the Third Century Documentary*.

Kiley, and Black. 2014. *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Uniforms of the Roman World: A Detailed Study of the Armies of Rome and Their Enemies, Including the Etruscans, Samnites, Carthaginians, Celts, Macedonians, Gauls, Huns, Sassanids, Persians and Turks*.

Sim, and Kaminski. 2012. *Roman Imperial Armour: The Production of Early Imperial Military Armour*.

description of Robert and Roger de Hauteville during the conquest of Sicily and southern Italy<sup>105</sup>. They were two Norman brothers who almost came to blows over inheritance and spheres of influence immediately before the conquest of Sicily in the 11<sup>th</sup> century but were able to reconcile in a heartfelt meeting.

Furthermore, it is important to mention the fact that Kings and Generals attempt to portray both sides in cases of wars. This may take place in a single video or by making several videos on the same topic from different points of view. An example for the latter would be their series on the first crusade, in which they give the western, Muslim and Byzantine sides of the conflict with their respective accents in the same manner and detail<sup>106</sup>. In cases where they are unwilling or unable to make such elaborate series about each side be it due to lack of information, viewer engagement or other they give similar amounts of time and detail within the single series on the topic to each respective side. When a contradiction in sources is apparent, they specifically state all alternative interpretations while stating which is which in an attempt to give viewers all possible sides and allow them to weigh the elements for themselves<sup>107</sup>. They also motivate their own chosen version of events with an explanation to why.

### **5.4.3. Sourcing**

Stemming from the previous point about accuracy, arises K&G's biggest problem – their lack of sourcing. This is especially visible in cases where they compare contradicting sourcing or cite a researcher as these are usually the only moments when viewers get the opportunity to know where the information comes from. Besides them, there are no in-video sources provided in the form of annotations or pop-ups, and no sources in the video descriptions. This forces viewers to deduct from the previously mentioned examples and then look up related materials themselves.

One other case where sources can be discovered are when their research team go into a video's comments to answer questions or to give additional information or corrections to the

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<sup>105</sup> Kings and Generals. 2020. *Battle of Cerami 1063 - Norman-Muslim War for Sicily Documentary*.

<sup>106</sup> Kings and Generals. *First Crusade*.

Kings and Generals. 2022. *Crusades From the Byzantine Perspective - Medieval History Documentary*.

<sup>107</sup> An example for such contradiction in historical narratives can be found at 9:30 in the following video: Kings and Generals. 2020. *Subutai - Genghis's Greatest General Documentary*.

video itself. There explicitly finding sources cited is a more likely possibility but such comments are not a regular occurrence.

This lack of bibliography is a huge problem to the credibility of information presented despite their apparent above listed attempts to remain an unbiased, detailed and reliable source of information themselves. It also does not allow viewers the opportunity to acquire a list of further reading/information to learn in their own time.

#### **5.4.4. Topics of Videos**

Kings and Generals has elected to tackle a plethora of topics in a variety of areas time periods; the breadth of their Ancient Civilisations playlist being but a single example of this. The majority of these topics are about Europe or its colonies in the Early Modern Age. Alternatively, topics often discuss areas which actively and regularly interacted with the European continent, such as the civilisations in the Middle East and North Africa, spanning from the Bronze Age to modern times.

Over the years they have attempted to diversify the areas discussed with videos coming out on the pre-Columbian civilisations, sub-Saharan countries, or the far east such as China or the Indian sub-continent. Still, it is evident that videos on these areas, when the Europeans are not concerned with them are focused predominantly on already popular timeframes or civilisations in the western eye. An example for this is their playlist on Pre-Columbian civilisation which is also heavily dominated by the time and events around the European arrival<sup>108</sup>. Additionally, a criticism can be raised<sup>109</sup> that these videos are rarer than the ones concerning European lands.

There has been a gradual shift away from purely military history. These videos, as stated above, include many topics on economic, cultural, religious, and other topics, often spurring as a continuation or addition to elements discussed in previous military videos or by starting entirely new series focused on them.<sup>109</sup> In this regard, they have been one of the first channels in this niche of historical YouTube creators to start discussing such matters, acting as an early adopter or a pioneer.

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<sup>108</sup> Kings and Generals. *Pre-columbian civilizations*.

<sup>109</sup> Kings and Generals. *Ancient civilizations*

#### 5.4.5. Logistics

The last aspect of K&G's videos are the logistics of their making. As a company that by now employs several full-time employees, alongside contractors such as their narrator, they need to ensure a stable source of income. This is especially in light of them creating their two branch-off channels and diversifying their video content with more niche topics, as opposed to the most popular historical ones. Nevertheless, due to the fact that YouTube revenue comes from advertisements watched spread across videos, they want to encourage viewers, especially those who are not regulars who follow all their content, to remain watching<sup>110</sup>. This is the reason for their continued focus on European-centric topics and more popular other ones. Ultimately, this often leads to some areas being overrepresented such as the Ancient and Medieval Mediterranean and middle east as seen in their Ancient Civilisations series<sup>111112</sup>, while others such as Indochina or Sub-Saharan Africa are almost entirely omitted unless in the context of Europe.

These effective restrictions on what videos are profitable also may create a push towards sensationalism. The biggest example for this is their current monthly coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war<sup>113</sup>, even though the channel originally would not discuss modern history<sup>114</sup>. This also brings the issue of uncertainty of information due to still classified information or in the case of Ukraine – lack of full information due to the conflict still being ongoing. There are ways, however, to circumvent this issue of topic restriction – sponsors and subsidiary platforms:

Having sponsors in videos is a standard practice for most YouTube channels, where they would promote a certain product at some point during the video or would make an entirely sponsored video either on said product or something closely surrounding it for money. Sponsors in videos are clearly stated as per YouTube's policy and are thus easily distinguishable and navigable. In essence, they can be less obstructive than even standard YouTube advertisements.

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<sup>110</sup> YouTube. *How YouTube creators earn money - how YouTube works*.

<sup>111</sup> Kings and Generals. *Ancient civilizations*.

<sup>112</sup> Kings and Generals. *Medieval battles*.

<sup>113</sup> Kings and Generals. *Russian Invasion of Ukraine*.

<sup>114</sup> Kings and Generals. Wikitubia.

On the other hand, there are third-party subsidiary platforms such as Patreon<sup>115</sup> upon which people can pay a subscription either on a monthly basis or on a video-by-video basis. Such platforms also often include early access to videos, behind the scenes content, more chances for communication with creators, unique supporter-specific videos, and other benefits. They are generally considered to be a good compromise that keeps content free of charge on YouTube while both giving loyal fans a way to directly support creators and for creators to ensure a steady income independent from the tumultuous YouTube advertisements<sup>116</sup>. To this a caveat must be added, as the issue of these perks may arise: behind the scenes access may mean that regular viewers may not be able to see important elements such as the process of collecting information for videos. As highlighted in the section about sourcing, this is a real detriment.

## **6. Invicta**

The second channel on the list is Invicta. It also follows the video model which Kings and Generals does and as such big parts of it will be examined in comparison and contrast to Kings and Generals itself.

### **6.1. History of the Channel**

Invicta began as a channel under the name of THFE Productions, initially focused on gaming videos it started with the Halo series of games and then moved onto the aforementioned series of historical games Total War. In early 2017<sup>117</sup> its creator and owner decided to rebrand and move onto producing into more historical videos. Prior to it he had also made other historical documentaries, battles specifically, alongside the gaming content. Examples for these include hour long documentaries on the battles of Adrianople (378 AD)<sup>118</sup> and Cannae (216 BC)<sup>119</sup>. What is notable, especially at the time of these videos releasing, is the emphasis on the human element of these conflicts, with in-video showings of what soldiers on the ground would have seen and felt as opposed to only the broader societal and political circumstances and changes surrounding these battles like on other channels. This specific focus on the human element will be explored further bellow as it forms the channels' main focus even until the present day. After

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<sup>115</sup> Patreon.com

<sup>116</sup> *YouTube Adpocalypse*. Wikitubia.

<sup>117</sup> Invicta. 2017. *The State of the Channel Address: 2017 Q1 - What Happened to Thfe Productions*.

<sup>118</sup> Invicta. *Battle of Adrianople (Documentary)*.

<sup>119</sup> Invicta. *Battle of Cannae (Documentary)*.

2018 the majority of the gaming videos were made private and/or moved to a second channel, Invicta Gaming<sup>120</sup>, as the main one moved almost exclusively to documentary style content<sup>121</sup>.

In the years after the transition a team was built, not unlike that of K&G, which helped him to create higher quality content. The narration on the channel began to be voiced by a hired narrator, as with K&G, or done by Oakley (the original creator) himself. The now team also began to take up a variety of underappreciated topics such as raising children<sup>122</sup>, taking care of pets<sup>123</sup>, cultural habits<sup>124</sup>, education, normal life in different civilisations' cities, entertainment, ancient laws<sup>125</sup>, etc. all across ancient and medieval history. Since the rebranding the channel has grown by a million subscribers to 1.2 million at the time of writing this paper and the videos on these cultural topics have played a large role in it due to their uniqueness on the platform.

## 6.2. Video topics

While military history was the birthplace of the channel, it is now not the dominating element on it with nearly half of the videos on the channel being non-military. The military videos on it are regularly on specific units of history<sup>126</sup>, aspects or persons who took place in these campaigns as opposed to the overarching views on K&G's side.

It is important to note that in the Units of History series, some of the recent videos have begun incorporating re-enactment footage from specialised reenactors who focus on trying to present information in the most living manner possible<sup>127</sup>. They do that by taking great care to research the topics they reconstruct in order to do it in the most authentic manner possible. This emerging symbiosis brings great benefits to Invicta as well as the reenactors through exposition and increased quality and details.

Next to all other topics, Invicta also engages into speculative videos. The most prominent of these would be the series about what would have happened had Julius Caesar not been killed<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup> *Invicta Gaming*. YouTube.

<sup>121</sup> Invicta. 2018. *The State of the Channel Address: 2018 Q2 - 300k Subscribers and New Documentaries*.

<sup>122</sup> Invicta. 2022. *What was it like to Grow Up Byzantine? Documentary*.

<sup>123</sup> Invicta. 2018. *How They Did It - Pet Dogs in Ancient Rome*.

<sup>124</sup> Invicta. 2020. *The Daily Life of Viking Pets: Cats, Dogs, and Polar Bears Documentary*.

<sup>125</sup> Invicta. 2022. *Law and Order in Ancient Rome - How did it work? Full Documentary*.

<sup>126</sup> Invicta. *Units of History Documentary*.

<sup>127</sup> Invicta. 2022. *How Did Roman Cataphracts Go To War? Documentary*.

<sup>128</sup> Invicta. 2022. *What if Julius Caesar Was Not Assassinated? - Alternate History Full Documentary*.

This series can be described as an approximation of how his already known plans would have unfolded had he not been murdered in 44 BC. While this is not historical in practice, it is a series which tackles an intriguing alternative while giving a good look at what sources Invicta use to reach these conclusions. This will be of significant importance when talking about their research process and sourcing.

Before moving forward, it is important to also state the role alternative history and speculation about alternative historical outcomes in general can have. In his 2007 review article titled *Telling It Like It Isn't? Alternate History and International History*, Ronald Granieri states that while alternative history can be a helpful tool for exploration “We should be mindful that, though we can manipulate narratives and exercise some control over the past, the manipulation does not guarantee control over the present or the future.”. This has been considered in this paper, with such alternative history content being taken into account as an example through which to evaluate the quality of sourcing, research and reasoning behind Invicta’s videos.

Recently the channel has also begun making long-form livestream type content which is intended to allow viewers to directly interact with the research team and get sources and additional information on the videos which each stream encompasses<sup>129</sup>. More detailed on this will be given later.

Lastly, before moving onto analysing the channel’s quality, it must be said that Invicta also have many videos on fantasy and sci-fi topics, especially but not exclusively in the “Units of” series<sup>130</sup>.

### **6.3. Five methods**

#### **6.3.1. Interesting Information**

The production quality of Invicta can only be described as excellent, art, maps and audio quality rivalling that of Kings and Generals. The content also has the aforementioned unique accent on the human element, especially in the areas of everyday life in history, as opposed to the great histories and battles. This specific niche has evidently drawn a million people in

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<sup>129</sup> Invicta. 2022. *Citation Needed: The Invicta October Wrap-up Stream (Q&A+ News)*.

<sup>130</sup> Invicta. 2021. *Units of Warhammer - The Skullcrushers of Khorne Documentary*.

following by providing a more relatable side of history through which viewers can look into the world of time past.

To accentuate further this relatability, the channel often attempts to compare ancient practices or habits to modern equivalents to show the similarities and change of time. An anecdotal example of this is their video on fast food in the Roman empire<sup>131</sup>, heavily comparing eating habits and the food itself of people then with those now.

### **6.3.2. Accuracy**

In this section examples such as the “What if Caesar hadn’t died”<sup>132</sup> series come to the forefront. In these episodes alone, they repeatedly compare ancient primary sources, historians, legal, and various contemporary records as well as modern analysis to build several possibilities of what Caesar’s planned invasions would have looked like, how they would have been planned and structured, and how they would have unfolded. Many times, these sources through which they employ are cited and compared in the videos themselves, letting the viewers to experience the process of building a picture so detailed of the past. It is important to note that, especially when considering the ancient sources such as Cassius Dio and even the several extrapolations made from Caesar’s writings on the Gallic wars (both mentioned in the video) much of the information must be taken with consideration as in both these examples there are many biases to be considered. Invicta, in this regard, balances out any specific claims for numbers from such sources with modern analysis, stating precisely why the ancient sources are doubted and what new estimates are.

This process is not limited to this series alone, however. The aforementioned constant comparison of the past to present, the usage of reenactors as footage and sources of information as well, underpin this dedication to providing nuanced and detailed depictions of the topics.

### **6.3.3. Sourcing**

Furthermore, Invicta largely does not share Kings and Generals’ problems with sourcing. Often times a bibliography can be seen in the video descriptions and they also regularly use explicit quotes in the videos themselves in order to give viewers the option to hear information

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<sup>131</sup> Invicta. 2021. *How They Did It - Fast Food in Ancient Rome Documentary*.

<sup>132</sup> Invicta. 2022. *What if Julius Caesar Was Not Assassinated? - Alternate History Full Documentary*.

when possible from the source itself. These sources range from books published by modern academic historians through primary sources to ancient historians and authors. While naturally the reliability of these sources can vary greatly between modern academic writing and old texts, Invicta meticulously ensure that all unreliable or contradictory elements are discussed in the videos. Through this, viewers are able to get a more detailed perspective on both the topic and the sources surrounding it as well as the possibility to further explore the topics by reading the bibliography and meeting information which may not have made it into the final cut of the videos.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that this bibliography is not a constant but a moderately occasional occurrence, thus not a certain. To their credit, Invicta began a new series in 2022 in the form of livestreams aimed to fulfil the role of Questions and Answers<sup>133</sup>. These once-a-month two-to-three-hour events see researchers and writers answering questions, adding information which did not make the final video scripts and presenting the sources they used in the month's videos. This new push for transparency and better communication, as well as better sourcing can easily be identified as one of the best sourcing methods on the YouTube platform even if solely looked at for the additional reading viewers may ask for during them.

#### **6.3.4. Topics of Videos**

Invicta specialises in less explored historical areas in the popular conscience, namely everyday life and human experiences. While this is not the only type of content seen on the channel, it does form its backbone giving it a unique position, that encourages viewer relatability to the topics. This by extension can be compared to historical re-enactments which also strive to bring the past to life. It can thus be said that it is no large surprise to see Invicta partner with some of them, combining the two fields through their shared goal.

In the “Units of History”<sup>134</sup> series this aforementioned focus on the human experience takes on a military angle by talking not only about the foundation and combat record of units but their habits, composition, equipment, sense of community, and even stories and legends surrounding them. Here, the same way as in the first documentaries the channel attempted before its

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<sup>133</sup> Invicta. 2022. *Citation Needed: The Invicta October Wrap-up Stream (Q&A+ News)*.

<sup>134</sup> Invicta. *Units of History Documentary*.

rebranding to Invicta, an attempt to humanize war and bring it beyond numbers, victories, and land and money exchanges.

The channel can thus certainly be described as attempting to bring the human element -into anything it does as a whole, even in the under-described fantasy and sci-fi videos they make on occasion. It has had a profound impact on the historical community, even to the point where smaller channels have also begun to emulate them by focusing on singular historical figures, cities or regions, in order to bring out this same feel about them. Even the much larger Kings and Generals began implementing biographies<sup>135</sup>, cultural, and economic<sup>136</sup> historical videos after Invicta's rapid growth due to their topic selection. While a causation on this cannot be realistically proven unless explicitly confirmed by the creators of one of these channels, the possibility that Invicta may have spearheaded this shift away from military and military related history is worth noting. Invicta has thus not only potentially started a movement within the historical YouTube but built its viewership around these core human elements of history. They have been a part of its historical content from even before the transition away from it being a gaming channel.

### **6.3.5. Logistics**

This last aspect of examination can largely be said to overlap with that of Kings and Generals due to the two channels' similar video structure, style, and upload patterns. The two notable exceptions to this are first the audience base of Invicta being built around the much less military, much more human content, and their introduction of these livestream questions and answers as a way to connect more with viewers. While K&G also organise some, they are not scheduled the same way and are for Invicta and are usually placed as private after the fact, meaning that only the people with the link to the video of the stream can access it. On the contrary, Invicta, not only have a regular schedule for these interactions with the viewers but keep the recordings publicly available for further watching or reference.

In the sphere of organisation, they are also much more open in comparison to K&G who keep their behind the scenes communication to Patreon (or other) supporters. Invicta, contrarily

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<sup>135</sup> Kings and Generals. *Thomas Cochrane*.

<sup>136</sup> Kings and Generals. 2019. *Why Was Egypt Crucial for the Roman Empire?*

does irregular channel updates (State of the Channel Updates) when big changes are forthcoming or want to ask for opinions on matters. While special supporters still hold a larger sway, regular viewers are able to acquire a much better understanding of the channel's innerworkings; a fact which combined with their openness about sources drastically improves the reliability of the content's quality.

## **7. Pete Kelly and Voices of the Past**

The last two channels, Pete Kelly and Voices of the Past, will be discussed partially together due to their common origins, a channel called History Time, and the fact they are run by two brothers. With the two channels being outlined, it will then be possible to move onto the quality criteria, in which they will be examined separately.

### **7.1. History and Video Topics**

History Time began in 2017 after Peter Kelly, commonly referred to as Pete, graduated from his history-related masters degree and was looking for a way to get into his field. During that time, he began writing historical papers which he decided to start uploading as an audio on YouTube<sup>137</sup>. Despite the fact that content on the platform is always in video format, audio is the correct term as both History Time and Voices of the Past are predominantly audio only; the video footage is at most used as a backdrop for the topic. These backgrounds often serve as orientation markers, such as images of the areas discussed, maps, or statues, drawings or other of the people discussed. The papers Peter published gradually began to gain popularity which prompted him to take the channel as his full-time job in 2019<sup>138</sup> and begin researching and writing new, longer form documentaries. He has remained the sole person working on the channel, putting into perspective the effort as the length of videos has gone from short 10-20-minute ones, to several hours in length.

In this context, Pete began a second channel by the name of Voices of the Past, with the idea to make it a library for first hand historical texts relating to the videos on History Time, as well as in general<sup>139</sup>. Soon after its creation, however, the channel was taken over by his brother,

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<sup>137</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*.

<sup>138</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*.

<sup>139</sup> Kelly, D. *Voices of the past*. YouTube.

David Kelly. David saw that the channel as a simple library could not fulfil its potential and draw an audience so he took upon himself to change its course<sup>140</sup>. This shift took form as the focus shifting away from storing texts into finding interesting and unique historical primary sources on many time periods, across the globe. These texts share in common a sense of human down-to-earth descriptions. Examples range from travellers' accounts in the middle ages<sup>141</sup>, through the oldest letter of complaint<sup>142</sup>, to the Japanese ambassadors in the US and their recollections of the months leading to the attack on Pearl Harbour<sup>143</sup>. The topics are, as stated, also often niche or overlooked in nature. An example for this is a video of a Chinese account on the Roman empire which became viral on YouTube<sup>144</sup>, sparking a flurry of content on this exact topic from other historical creators, *Invicta and Kings and Generals* included. This video also marks the breakthrough the channel needed to begin its rise to its current 647,000 subscribers. *Voices of the Past* has also often collaborated with *History Time*<sup>145</sup> on videos.

The second channel is *Pete Kelly*<sup>146</sup>, which began as a purely vlog channel upon which Pete would upload footage of his travels to historical dig sites during his research for the main channel. It has since developed into an amalgamation of historical topics in addition to the tour guide-type content which can be found in the vlogs<sup>147</sup>. There are also mini-documentaries of new discoveries or developments in the historical field<sup>148</sup>. In regard to the videos on the development of the historical field, through them the channel provides a starkly different outlook on history and the way the conclusions considered as historical fact by the public are reached. All content on it still continues to follow the principle of being developed around conferences or visitations of sites.

## 7.2. Five Methods – Pete Kelly

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<sup>140</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*.

<sup>141</sup> *Voices of the Past*. 2020. *Marco Polo Describes the Mongols // 13th cent. Primary Source*.

<sup>142</sup> *Voices of the Past*. 2019. *World's Oldest Complaint Letter (Ancient Sumeria) // 2nd Millennium BC // Ancient Primary Source*.

<sup>143</sup> *Voices of the Past*. 2021. *Japanese Diplomat to US Describes Desperate Last Days Before Pearl Harbor // Memoir of Saburo Kurusu*.

<sup>144</sup> *Voices of the Past*. 2019. *Ancient Chinese Historian Describes The Roman Empire // 3rd century AD "Weilüe" // Primary Source*.

<sup>145</sup> Kelly, P. *History Time*. YouTube.

<sup>146</sup> Kelly, P. *Pete Kelly*. YouTube.

<sup>147</sup> Pete Kelly. *Visiting Archaeological Sites*.

<sup>148</sup> Pete Kelly. *Archaeology News*.

### **7.2.1. Interesting Information**

Pete Kelly as a channel is much more minimalistic in comparison to Kings and Generals and Invicta, owing to its focus predominantly on audio with the exception of vlog videos. The lack of visuals can be considered a drawback as it limits the way information can be conveyed, however, the opportunity for it to be entirely listened to cannot be overlooked. This type of content allows viewers to consume it while doing something else, the same way a podcast or an audiobook can be. With the growth of video length across both History Time and Pete Kelly this makes the ability to do so even more appealing in light of YouTube considering 10-15-minute<sup>149</sup> videos optimal due to its internal statistics showing how longer videos receive less traffic. On the contrary, these videos eliminate this concern, freeing people to consume them in a much freer way.

In regards to the vlogs themselves, vlogging content is generally popular on YouTube as a platform. As such, the vlogs found on Pete Kelly fit well with this concept. Additionally, they are not focused entirely on the time spent on the location but also take their time to explore the journey, the feeling, and the experience of getting there before learning about the site. In this they add a certain travel feeling to the otherwise tour guide video, immersing people in the process. In combination with the topic historical news, the content on the channel is highly unique and yet specialised. This translates to it naturally being less popular with wider audiences, due to its structure. While viewer count does not translate to better presented information, it is an important aspect to state, illustrating the type of audience who follow it.

### **7.2.2. Accuracy**

Pete Kelly, as well as the others run by the man of the same name, have the opportunity to state upfront that they are run by a professional historian with full control over what is put on the channel. This can be seen as both a positive and a negative – him being a single person working on these projects means that there are no second readers or checks and balances to examine his work and ensure that it is not potentially misrepresenting certain aspects. On the other hand however, he balances this with the focus on locations being specifically visited, with a plethora of details, big and small, being described during the discussion of these locations;

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<sup>149</sup> Tubics. *What is the ideal length of videos on YouTube? here are new data-based answers.*

information which would not be available to visitors without specific prior knowledge of the topic or area. An example for this would be his visit to Sutton Hoo, where he gave a detailed tour of the dig site and the area around it in a two consecutive videos<sup>150</sup> - in these videos he discussed a myriad of remarkable facts, alongside the usual, easily-accessible information to tourists. This creates a sense of quality in the viewers who can observe the process of acquiring information for a topic as it unfolds before them.

In regards to the Archaeology News<sup>151</sup>, it is largely based upon new information being published in peer-reviewed papers or described at academic conferences, such as the new laser mapping methods developed in the recent years and the consequent discoveries done with it<sup>152</sup>. When information is listed from a conference, he will reference the conference in question, including when and where it is hosted, alongside any notable attendees such as researchers, professors, and archaeologists. This discussion about collecting and presenting information leads into the next aspect of sourcing.

### **7.2.3. Sourcing**

While the videos on the channel do not contain a specialised citation system, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, all conference-related information is stated with the conference from which it was acquired. Alternatively, when discussing new research publications or discoveries, links to the studies are provided in the video descriptions and they themselves or their origins are often stated in the video. These studies are always peer reviewed academic ones, predominantly focused on new discoveries in the field. Beyond the archaeology news series where the majority of this research can be found, he utilises many academic books by historians and academicians. Some of these books are readily available in a shop list of favourite historical literature he created and has placed in the descriptions of his videos<sup>153</sup>.

In the case of tour guide videos, while the sources of the information are often not specifically listed (such as if he had read something about the site and states specifically the source) yet any such occurrences are mentioned in the narration itself. Furthermore, several of

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<sup>150</sup> Pete Kelly. 2021. *'Greatest Archaeological Discovery in British History' - Visiting Sutton Hoo.*

Pete Kelly. 2021. *Walking Along The River of the Anglian Kings // From Woodbridge to Sutton Hoo.*

<sup>151</sup> Pete Kelly. *Archaeology News.*

<sup>152</sup> Pete Kelly. 2020. *Breaking News - Hidden Roman City Finally Mapped Using Groundbreaking Laser Technology.*

<sup>153</sup> Reis-Frankfort, et al. 2018. *The Shop*

these tour guides can serve as additional sources of information in relation to the main videos on History Time; the same can be said about some of the Breaking/Archaeological News videos as well.

In terms of sourcing, the only criticism that can be raised is that the sources are usually listed as links as opposed to proper citations, however, this is a minor complaint in relation to the lack of proper sourcing often found across YouTube historical channels.

#### **7.2.4. Topics of Videos**

The videos on the channel can only be described as highly unique and specialised, closer in structure to academic publications, as opposed to content aimed at general viewers. This leaves the Pete Kelly channel at a disadvantage in opposition to other channels due to their niche nature going against the form of content most YouTube users engage with – content trends, rapid upload schedule of shorter videos, and most importantly, broader, less detailed topics which draw the larger audiences. Instead, Peter researches and presents content which he has planned and deemed important or interesting enough to, as shown by the unusually long length of his content and the refusal to build a team around himself.

#### **7.2.5. Logistics**

In the aspect of logistics, Pete Kelly is almost entirely run on ad revenue and sponsors, though the latter is not a certainty for each video unlike with many other channels. Patreon subscribers are also shared between the two channels run by him, but it is not pushed as a platform, without regular reminders to support there and without special perks offered by being a supporter there. Furthermore, due to the one-man team and the depth and size of videos, the upload schedule is also really sparse, with them coming months apart from each other.

Because of these factors, the Pete Kelly channel is not able to capitalise on the rapid upload speed and specific video lengths favoured by the YouTube algorithm. However, this slower schedule allows for the content to be developed with depth and care in mind, as shown by the numerous on-location videos.

### **7.3. Methods – Voices of the Past**

#### **7.3.1. Interesting Information**

Voices of the Past as a channel began blossoming as an attempt to make a primary source library into something interesting and appealing to a larger audience. To achieve this, the channel began exploring accounts focused specifically on more human and intriguing aspects of history that would gather people's attention. While this will be further explored in regards to the logistics of doing so, for the purposes of presenting information in an interesting manner and retaining the viewership, the videos themselves rely entirely on David Kelly's diction and on the texts themselves. As such, it can be said that the channel hedges its success on his ability to find and get translated to English appealing enough texts.

### **7.3.2. Accuracy**

Since Voices of the Past's content is almost entirely the reading out of primary sources, this section can be seen as less relevant to its quality. This however is not entirely true as in the interview with his brother Peter Kelly<sup>154</sup>, he stated that he embraces inaccuracies and biases in the texts he presents as this allows people two opportunities: to begin discussion in the comment sections, exchanging information and knowledge about the sources, and the context around them, and to see how when two alien to each other cultures meet they attempt to explain to their countrymen what the other side looks like. The appeal to the second point lies in the biases these explanations carry, which can reflect on these people's culture and way of expression (the musing Chinese narratives about what the Roman empire looks like<sup>155</sup>, contrasted to the curt Roman counterpart which speaks almost entirely about how China could benefit Rome with its silks<sup>156</sup>) and their attempts to explain things in a way which will be understood back home.

The other thing of importance to state is the information between primary sources in the several documentaries<sup>157</sup> released on it, though, this information is rarely more than a way to bridge the time between different primary sources.

### **7.3.3. Sourcing**

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<sup>154</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*

<sup>155</sup> Voices of the Past. 2019. *Ancient Chinese Historian Describes The Roman Empire // 3rd century Ad "Weilüe" // Primary Source.*

<sup>156</sup> Voices of the Past. 2019. *Roman Scholar Describes Ancient China // 1st century Ad // Pliny the Elder on the "Seres".*

<sup>157</sup> Voices of the Past. 2021. *How Japan Became a Great Power in Only 40 Years (1865 - 1905) // Japanese History Documentary.*

In regard to sourcing, the channel is based entirely on primary sources which are explicitly stated either in the video titles themselves or the descriptions of videos. On occasion comments by viewers versed in the topic, giving more background information about the authors or works used in the video can be found as an additional source of information. An example for this can be seen in a comment confirmed to be true by David, on one of the channel's most successful videos, mentioned above – that of the Chinese historian describing the Roman empire. The translation for this video, alongside the suggested Roman versions of the Chinese names used, are credited to John E. Hill, an independent long-time scholar focusing on Central Asian Studies<sup>158</sup> who published it to the University of Washington website<sup>159</sup>.

#### **7.3.4. Topics of Videos**

Not many details are known about the way in which sources that form the backbone of the channel are found and translated. In the interview with his brother Pete<sup>160</sup>, David said that he would find texts not only by looking for them or by suggestions by viewers but also through random chance of encountering interesting new information in his day-to-day life. David also works as an English and literature teacher in Spain<sup>161</sup>, thus allowing him opportunities to interact with many students who could inspire different ideas for potentially interesting stories to be recreated into video format.

#### **7.3.5. Logistics**

Finally, on the side of logistics, the channel is in contradiction to most others on the platform. Due to its content's nature, it does not follow the YouTube standard upload structure with videos coming out at sporadic intervals when good enough sources are found. This means that on the monetary side, the channel is not a reliable source – it does not have a Patreon page for donations and due to the periodicity of releases it can only run a limited amount of sponsorship segments. This however, is not a problem with its content since unlike the other channels analysed in this paper, it is not the primary source of income for its creator, freeing it from the pressures this entails.

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<sup>158</sup> John Hill. Academia.edu

<sup>159</sup> Hill, J. E. 2004. *The peoples of the West*.

<sup>160</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*

<sup>161</sup> Pete Kelly. 2020. *A Trip To Segovia // Ancient Roman City In Spain*.

It is important to lastly note that all custom art used on the channel is credited, usually when it is used in the community tab of the channel and all text translators, when applicable are also named and thanked in the video description.

## **8. Discussion**

Up until this point the YouTube channels have been described in detail – their work, background, and content styles – alongside their strengths and weaknesses according to the five criteria established. Now it is possible to finally turn to answering the main question of this paper: whether their quality is sufficient to be an effective tool for teaching to secondary schoolers. This will be done in light of the qualities already selected: proper sourcing, whether the quality of the content presented is at a sufficient enough level for academic purposes, whether the information is detailed enough for a classroom environment, and whether and how the viewers affect the content produced on these channels (and how this affects the quality).

Thus far the analysis demonstrated that a lack of sourcing and the effect viewers have on the selected content produced and uploaded on these channels are problematic. This is due to the fact that sourcing is the most direct way to establish whether the information presented in the videos is well founded or not, and the impact financial sustainability through viewership have on the channels and their context<sup>162</sup>, they will be the main deciding factors for channel quality. In this regard, it is important to preface that a channel with a narrow focus of topics dictated by viewers or others does not necessitate inaccurate or badly produced content; only that the breadth of topics is limited. Before going into more detail on that, it is pertinent to touch upon the last aspect unconcerned by these two broader subtopics:

In the previous section the channels in the core of this paper were discussed: Kings and Generals, Invicta, Pete Kelly, and Voices of the past. One thing they share is the high production quality of the videos, which turns them into an attractive medium for adolescents. However, the content should take priority.

### **8.1. Viewers' effect on videos produced**

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<sup>162</sup> YouTube. *How YouTube creators earn money - how YouTube works.*

This following subsection will be dedicated to discussing the effect viewers have on YouTubers and the content they produce – from the monetary causes to the influence the viewership (and creator origin) can have on the way historical topics are examined in videos.

YouTuber is a job, either a part time or a full time one, for many of the creators on the platform<sup>163</sup>. As such they are highly dependent on the earnings from their videos. They are directly affected by the number of advertisements<sup>164</sup>. Notably, some can be skipped after a short period of time but only the fully watched ones count as watched and thus pay out to their creators<sup>165</sup>. The reliance on advertisement revenue in combination with the necessity to make the videos appealing to the YouTube algorithm in order for them to be promoted and viewed more<sup>166</sup> creates a vicious circle where creators may find themselves needing to prioritise making content that sells better than to cover more niche topics that would diversify their output. Viewers then can have a large impact on the videos produced, as shown for example by Kings and General's focus on European and European-related history.

## **8.2. Further financing and other support**

The second effect viewers have on videos produced is through their support beyond watching advertisements. As shown above, a large majority of channels make use either of the YouTube member program where people can support them through the platform or external, third party platforms. Also, as stated above, these special memberships, subscriptions and donations also play a major role in the content produced. With the options for subscribers to donate on a per-video or per-month basis, creators can ensure a stable source of income divorced from the turbulence of YouTube monetization or its algorithm. Since even small donations on Patreon equal to large numbers of advertisement engagement on YouTube, it is one of the preferred ways of gaining support<sup>167</sup>. It also doubles as a platform to engage with subscribers – asking for feedback and suggestions, providing them with exclusive content or information about the way the channel functions. This provides creators both with stability and a way to give back,

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<sup>163</sup> Kozak. 2022. *Creator economy / content entrepreneur research*.

<sup>164</sup> *YouTube Adpocalypse*. Wikitubia.

<sup>165</sup> YouTube. *How YouTube creators earn money - how YouTube works*.

<sup>166</sup> Eves. 2021. *The YouTube Formula: How Anyone Can Unlock the Algorithm to Drive Views, Build an Audience, and Grow Revenue*.

<sup>167</sup> Investing Book Summaries. 2021. *How Much Does YouTube Pay For Ads? - What do YouTubers Make Per 1000 Views?*

but can also additionally push their content in a certain manner, amplifying the pressure caused by the YouTube algorithm in the first place. This comes with the exception that creators with big enough support can gain the freedom to explore and branch out such as in the case of Wizards and Warriors, for example.

Nevertheless, even so the majority of the supporters come from western countries and thus the content they want to watch is specific in nature, leading to the next point of western bias.

### **8.3. Western Bias**

As stated, due to the majority of these channels' viewership being located in western countries, the topics reflect this fact. The best example, shown earlier in this paper, is the almost complete lack of representation of states and polities in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa and large portions of far-east Asia as well as the Mesoamerican civilisations. Both of these areas boast unique and ancient cultures and histories, yet are almost entirely excluded from videos unless in concern with other lands' history. In this subsection more examples of this will be given, in examining the way these channels discuss history across the planet – whether they do and if they do not, and is this a detriment. First, however, it is important to define what “biased history” is and in its context, what western bias is.

A definition given by C. Behan McCullagh in his paper *The Truth of History*<sup>168</sup> states that bias in history is simply an unfair historical description on account of it being misleading. An example for this he gives is showing a person's good sides only, thus implying they are a saint, as opposed to a nuanced human being. Another aspect he tackles<sup>169</sup> is the under-description of a historical subject which leaves its details unfounded. His example for this is in casual explanations, which often omit important context to events. Due to the often overview-focused nature of YouTube content these aspects play an especially large role – whether creators are able to give a good overview of events while being able to keep a balanced view of all sides.

In the light of the underrepresented lands and cultures discussed above in this paper, this means that whenever some areas outside of the usual European circle are discussed they are often fetishized in a caricature of themselves. Historical channels may present them in as much

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<sup>168</sup> p. 58-61

<sup>169</sup> McCullagh. 2000. *Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation*.

factuality possible, however, the fascination which brings viewers to such content topics is often unrealistic and idealistic – for example a romanticised version of feudal Japan, focused primarily on glory and the samurai codes<sup>170</sup>.

In the context of balancing the different sides of an event, their interpretation is aspect spoken about by McCullagh<sup>171</sup>. Often, especially in the context of conflicts, there are multiple interpretations. YouTube channels aim to present well-flowing, engaging videos, therefore sometimes a good narrative can be considered as important, if not more, than presenting an accurate one. This is especially true in contexts where it is uneasy to establish a concrete historical narrative; channels being forced to focus on a single version of it, omitting or diminishing readings seen as less accurate and fitting.

Finally, this turns to the problem of western historical bias in general. Western bias is often also called European bias and in the field of YouTube history stems from the fact that most channels on the platform are comprised of European or US citizens, alongside with their primary audience. The primary concern on this bias is of course the Eurocentric view on events<sup>172</sup>; it has already been touched upon in this paper that a prevalence of such topics can be found, with some areas of the world being highly neglected in comparison.

In relation to the interpretation of history, this means that channels which strive to maintain impartiality in presenting events need to carefully find sources for different interpretations and find a way to portray them in equal manner. Taking Kings and Generals as an example, whenever they discuss such a topic they list all different readings of it before stating which one or number of them they will focus on and why. This can be seen as a way to portray impartiality and examining events from all sides, however, coupled with their troubled sourcing practices, it further undermines their position or being a reliable source of information. Furthermore, this is not a perfect solution, as some versions may be left under-described, even if the reasons for doing so are sound in nature, such as the reliability of the version.

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<sup>170</sup> White and White. 2021. *Romanticized Japan: Contextualizing Japan Through the Western Gaze*.

<sup>171</sup> McCullagh. 2000. *Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation*.

<sup>172</sup> Nakip. 2014. *Eurocentrism in World History Textbooks: The Case of Canada*

Hobson. 2012. *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory*

In relation to casual explanation, the nuances which may arise from the previous point or other sources can prove to be a detriment to accuracy and bias. With YouTube videos usually remaining short in nature, around the 15-minute mark, they are naturally unable to go into such detail as an academic book or paper can<sup>173</sup>. Short-form content like this will naturally be forced to leave out details, which risks building a one-sided narrative without the nuance of the two sides in an equal manner. Again, taking K&G as an example, in cases where they look at different sides of a single event, as in the case of the First Crusade<sup>174</sup>, then they are able to go into more details for each side, but when a video series is not deemed needed, there may be details left out.

#### **8.4.Sources**

The second big aspect of YouTuber quality that will be looked at is their ability to properly source the content they create. Proper sourcing is a major element in determining the quality of a piece of academic or educational work, which these videos attempt to be. Giving viewers to see where the information which goes into the scripts comes from allows them to not only see for themselves whether it is correct but also provides them with a way to explore a topic further. The latter point is in importance to note, especially in the context of the casual explanation these videos engage in, as per McCullagh's term<sup>175</sup>.

In relation to McCullagh's works on the Historical Method, it is important to also explore whether YouTube historians adhere to the principles of historical methodology. Namely, whether they reflect upon the information they present in their videos. An example of this include examining contradicting sources when they present themselves and how they convey this to the public.

Furthermore, the question of what sources are even considered reputable must be asked. According to the University of Washington as per described on their library website, there are several ways to determine source credibility<sup>176</sup>. They can still be applied to historical sources with a few changes and asterisks. The primary one being that historical texts were largely written

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<sup>173</sup> Tubics. *What is the ideal length of videos on YouTube? here are new data-based answers.*

<sup>174</sup> Kings and Generals. *First Crusade.*

<sup>175</sup> McCullagh. 2000. *Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation.*

<sup>176</sup> University of Washington. *FAQ: How do I know if my sources are credible/reliable?*

for a contemporary audience. This means that they lack background information that modern-day readers need to understand the text, or might be biased. Depending on the number of points of information, this can leave them with varying interpretations of events which is what YouTubers are then left to use in their videos, as most creators do not do research on their own. They are therefore left to use and justify these contradicting pieces of information. Exactly how they do so is left up to the individual creators, however, a broad trend can be noticed where they would point out less scientifically supported interpretations as well, before either explaining them in detail as an alternative or discarding them with an explanation as to why. This refers back to the problem of selecting appropriate sources and being able to justify their choices in an appropriate manner.

#### **8.4.1. Dealing with sources**

There are different ways of dealing with sources: in-video citations, in-video quoting, sourcing in the description, off-platform documents (listed usually in the video description), external videos, and questions and answers sessions in the comments. In this following section, the channels and their approaches to this topic will be looked at; comments about the quality of citations and the possible improvements will be discussed.

#### **8.4.2. Source handling per channel**

The first channel which will be discussed is Invicta. In terms of sourcing they are at the forefront. Invicta enables viewers to interact with the writers and researchers for additional context or ways to further understand and explore the topic. The majority of their sourcing is done directly in-video through quotation of and reference to literature. They sometimes place a bibliography within the video descriptions.

These things being listed, it is not a perfect way of handling it. As stated, providing bibliography for the individual videos is not consistent and while the quotations and references in the videos fulfil a large section of the information, they cannot replace a bibliography entirely. As such, if Invicta are to become truly stable in their citing practices, this is an issue which will need to be addressed. The main reason for this is ensuring the impartiality of sources.

The second channel to be discussed regarding sources is Kings and Generals. In their overview it was seen that they generally lack a coherent sourcing method with viewers often not

receiving any such information besides the occasional mention of an author (primary or secondary ) when describing or citing a source in a video Combined with the lack of information in the video descriptions themselves, this leaves the channel with almost no information backing.

Leaving viewers without sources in the videos, even before considering avenues for further exploration of topics, is a large problem for the academic credibility of the channel. Additionally, in regards to the methodology, it is in these rare occasions where they usually happen to name a source as proof of contradicting or incomplete sources. This though, is yet again not a consistent element with many discussions of sources being able to be summed up with vague quotes such as “archaeologists have found...”, “sources suggest that...”, etc. While all this can be confirmed by the viewers by researching on their own, K&G’s videos do little to provide them with this information to begin with. An alternative is for writers and researchers to be closely monitoring the comments and answering to any and all questions which is highly impractical with hundreds of comments per video.

In terms of citations, likely due to his background in academia, Pete Kelly’s videos are consistently properly sourced and substantiated. Pete Kelly is a trained historian who has found an alternative way to publish papers per his own description – through YouTube<sup>177</sup>. He is also a single person working across his two channels. This means that his publications are not peer reviewed and are also unchecked by a second reader before their upload. As such viewers are left to trust in him to present an accurate and unbiased perspective on a topic, unless they themselves decide to follow in his footsteps and research the topics discussed.

The last channel is Voices of the Past, a sort of library of a channel. Due to its nature there is not much to say about the quality of sourcing and methodology, since all videos contain the source from which they are taken and any applicable translators. The only thing of note are the occasional documentaries that are uploaded on it, though they themselves predominantly consist of source fragments like the other content, with the narration between each piece being a summary of additional source text connecting the elements.

## **9. Conclusion; Values of the selected channels for school use**

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<sup>177</sup> The History Brothers. 2021. *2020 New Year Special - Q & A with History Time & Voices of the Past*

In this paper the question “*Is the quality of YouTube history channels sufficient to be an effective tool for teaching history to secondary schoolers?*” was asked. In order for it to be answered the structure of the current historical education system was presented. Then the paper turned to examining the channels Kings and Generals, Invicta, Pete Kelly, and Voices of the Past for the quality of their content in regard to production, accuracy, and sourcing, alongside the effect the logistics of running a channel have on the content produced.

Thus, it was shown that these channels can fulfil a great supporting role as educational tools as through their high production quality, clear video structure, and relatable topics they have the potential to interest many students in the field. However, they have also shown a level of academic unreliability, especially in regards to the matter of sourcing. While Invicta is pioneering new way of sourcing content and providing viewers with additional information in an online environment, Kings and Generals are doing a definitively inadequate job at providing the necessary sourcing to ensure the reliability of their content. Pete Kelly and Voices of the Past, in the meanwhile, display an adequate if not excellent level of sourcing. These four creators, however, display the overarching trends within the YouTube historical community with some content being properly researched and proven while other the complete opposite. Therefore, teachers who chose to use such content in their classrooms would need to personally ensure that the under- or un-sourced channels’ content is of a sufficient quality. Alternatively, these flaws in providing literature can be used as a way to begin discussions in class about the importance of sourcing to ensure information reliability. These discussions can also be developed into ones about the general reliability of information on the Internet, helping students to develop early the ability to determine information reliability.

In addition to this, historical YouTube content can continue to fulfil the role it is used in now – that of allowing teachers to quickly and easily present information or introduce a topic in an engaging manner to pupils. Further, due to the ability to watch YouTube on a mobile phone or other portable devices, students also have the ability to watch or listen to these videos while doing other tasks, helping save time for other educational or other activities.

Lastly, due to the commercial factor of channels, there is an impact on the variety of topics which can be discovered on these channels. As shown by the specialised channels such as Eastern Roman History, niche specialised content is available, but not about everything and not

about all areas. Thus, due to financial and viewership pressures, bigger channels who theoretically have the ability to make such content, in most cases do not. Most content therefore is focused around the demands of the biggest markets, resulting in highly westernised, Eurocentric content which while providing great freedom when teaching this history, may be a detriment in other cases.

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