



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter briefly describes the goal and general argument of the book, along with its theoretical framework and data collection, and introduces the Swedish case. First, we set the discussion of labour movements' trade union revitalization and usage of social media—and particularly of YouTube—into the broader context of scholarly literature. Second, we introduce the Swedish case and compare the videos uploaded by Swedish trade unions with those uploaded by trade union confederations in other European countries. We also explain why we are investigating trade unions representing different social classes—namely, the working class, middle class and upper middle class. Third, we briefly describe the data collection and coding process and explain the methods of analysis used in this book: the rough metadata-based analysis of all videos uploaded by Swedish trade unions to YouTube during the period 2007–2017 (a total of 4535 videos), the detailed qualitative content analysis of 624 randomly selected videos and a qualitative analysis of 60 videos.

**Keywords** Revitalization · Trade unions · Social classes · YouTube · Metadata

‘What does a woman need to do to get a raise?’ This question, posed in a YouTube video produced by the Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union in March 2014 (Kommunal 2014, March 5), is a central one.

Although Sweden is considered one of the most progressive and gender-equal countries in the world, there is still a persistent gender wage gap, and women still earn less than men: ‘women work for free after four o’clock whereas men get paid until five’. In the video, Annelie Nordström, chairperson of the union at the time, sits quietly on a chair in front of the camera. The background is white. A make-up artist puts a protective apron on her and then starts giving her a makeover, tucking her hair away in a hair cap and putting on a wig. The video uses a speed-up effect, so the whole transformation is finished in less than a minute. When the make-up artist removes the apron that was covering Nordström’s shoulders, the blouse, skirt and necklace she was initially wearing are gone; she now wears a grey suit and a tie. Her brown page-boy haircut is gone, and she has been transformed into a partially bald grey-haired man. At this point, the speaker’s voice asks: ‘So what does a woman need to do to get a raise? The answer is simple’, and for the first time in the video, Annelie Nordström speaks straight into the camera: ‘Be a man’. The video ends with a call for action: ‘We cannot wait for another hundred years. Protest against gender inequality!’

This video, which is appropriately titled ‘How to get a raise in 47 seconds’ (the video lasts exactly 47 seconds), constitutes a good example of online activism and is one of thousands of videos posted on YouTube by trade unions all over the world. Indeed, online activism is a natural part of communication—not only for unions, but for all organizations today.

With the launch of Web 2.0 with social media, the way people used the Internet shifted: instead of one-way communication in which people consumed what was posted by others on webpages, social media offered easy ways for users to generate and publish their own content on the Internet. More importantly, social media offered a means to interact with viewers and other users. Communication channels have never been so easy to access, and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube were quickly adopted by all kinds of activists—from less-organized crowds to traditional social movements (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Mattoni and Treré 2014). A simple post on Facebook can facilitate the spontaneous coordination of demonstrations, and activities that used to require resources and planning in advance can now occur very quickly. The low cost of online social action has decreased the importance of resources for mobilization (Earl and Kimport 2011), and it has been argued that the collective action of social movements and civil society organizations has been converted into online ‘connective action’

(Bennett and Segerberg 2012). In order to better understand these changes, and how social movements function today, it is necessary to scrutinize these new means of communication.

In this book, we investigate new communication strategies used by ‘old’ social movements, with a specific focus on the labour movement. It was foreseen years ago (Cloward and Piven 2001, p. 93) that the Internet could provide the labour movement with new means of strengthening its power. However, information and communication technology (ICT) not only offers new possibilities, but also challenges established organizations, their mobilization strategies and their identities. Adjusting to the new digital environment can be troublesome for some organizations, and smooth and easy for others.

Throughout its history, the labour movement has been eager to adopt new technology (e.g. newspapers and film) to communicate with its members and with society at large. Contemporary social media platforms are no exception. In a time when an increasing share of the population has a smartphone, which ensures Internet access everywhere and at any time, trade unions (along with many other organizations) have entered social media. One incentive for choosing these new channels of communication is the outreach and appeal of social media to young people, which could solve the unions’ continual problem of membership decline. In the wake of significant membership losses, unions’ bargaining powers and political influence have weakened, creating a crisis for organized labour (Waddington 2014). Even countries with traditionally strong trade unions, such as Sweden, have come to experience a decline in union density. In response, both activists and researchers have focused on formulating strategies to reverse the trend and *revitalize* the union movement (Frege and Kelly 2004). One of these proposed ‘revitalization strategies’ is the use of ICT, and particularly of social media (Bailey et al. 2010).

Trade unions and Internet usage are not a new topic; in fact, a growing number of studies have analysed various aspects of unionism and ICT. Researchers quickly saw the potential of the Internet for mobilization; they claimed that ICT would empower the union movement (Shostack 1999) and improve ordinary union work (Diamond and Freeman 2002), and suggested that the new technology could even be used to realize the labour movement’s goal of internationalism (Lee 1997). One area of study focused on trade unions and Web 1.0 and investigated how unions use home pages and what type of information they post online (Kerr and

Waddington 2014; Rego et al. 2014). Existing studies on Web 2.0 have examined trade unions and social media, with a particular focus on the potential of social media for improving the interactions between a union and its members (Panagiotopoulos 2012), facilitating transnational networks (Dahlberg-Grundberg et al. 2016) and building transnational labour solidarity (Geelan and Hodder 2017). Prior research has also studied how Web 2.0 has influenced the member-elite relations within labour organizations (Lucio et al. 2009). Despite this comprehensive research, however, there is still a lack of systematic knowledge about the different ways unions use Web 2.0 platforms for revitalization.

One reason for this research gap is methodological: there is a bias towards using survey data to detect social media strategies, which involves *asking* unions about their social media use (Kerr and Waddington 2014; Panagiotopoulos and Barnett 2015; Scaramuzzino and Scaramuzzino 2017). Survey data and interviews with union representatives are certainly important for our understanding of how unions perceive the new technology in terms of opportunities and challenges, or how members use these new technologies (Thorntwaite et al. 2018). However, this approach says little about the content of unions' communication—that is, what unions actually *do* and *say* on social media. An emerging research field has acknowledged this gap in our knowledge about unions' online activities and has turned its focus towards the content of unions' social media activities and messages. In particular the use of hashtags (e.g. Chivers et al. 2017; Hodder and Houghton 2015) and network analyses mapping how unions interact with each other and other organizations online (Carneiro 2018; Chivers et al. 2017) have been scrutinized. Frequencies as well as content of tweets have also been mapped (Fowler and Hagar 2013). There is a clear bias, however, towards analysing Twitter among these studies, and we still lack in-depth studies that focus on the content of unions' messages: Do trade unions target new non-unionized groups, as revitalization proponents suggest? Do trade unions react to political events such as elections via social media? Or, more generally, what images of trade unions are communicated via social media? How have unions changed their communication over time, and are there any differences in online communication between unions that represent different societal groups?

This book aims to answer these questions based on a systematic analysis of more than 4500 videos that have been uploaded to YouTube by Swedish trade unions.

## 1.1 WHY FOCUS ON TRADE UNION REVITALIZATION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA?

The crux of the trade union crisis undoubtedly lies in unions' decreasing membership numbers. Declining membership is part of a vicious cycle of decreased membership engagement, weakening bargaining powers and declining political influence (Murray 2017). This trend cuts across all of Europe: all countries have experienced similar trends, including countries with traditionally high union density, such as Sweden. Studies tracing the cause of the trade union crisis indicate that structural changes in the economy and in the labour force have played significant roles. Above all, such analyses reveal that globalization is at the core of the situation, resulting in innumerable studies on how globalization has changed labour standards, strengthened the bargaining power of employers, contributed to changed employment contracts and made labour global while unions remain national (Bieler and Lindberg 2011; Fleming and Søbørg 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014; Kim and Kim 2003; Standing 2011; Williams et al. 2013). Government politics and unions' poor choice of strategies to mobilize workers are two other explanations that have been suggested by research mapping the decline in organized labour (Verma and Kochan 2004, pp. 5–6). It has been argued that unions have lost both their 'stick' and their 'carrot': with fewer members, well-organized industrial action is no longer a threat for employers or governments. Once unions have lost their ability to mobilize support in favour of particular political reforms, they can no longer offer help to implement delicate political reforms. Thus, the incentive for governments to uphold social partnership has decreased (Culpepper and Regan 2014).

Scholars have proposed many different renewal strategies to solve the situation. There is not just a need to 'bring back' former members; it is also necessary to recruit groups that have been previously underrepresented in trade unions (Frege et al. 2014; Frege and Kelly 2004; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014, pp. 81–101; Mrozowicki and Trawińska 2013). Although different studies have given these strategies different names, the categorizations overlap greatly (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014, pp. 46ff.). Frege and Kelly (2003, p. 9) have identified six different strategies for trade union revitalization: the organizing model, organizational restructuring, coalition building, cooperation with employers, political actions and international

cooperation. In other words, unions should return to social movement unionism—an organizational model in which members take an active part.

While some of these strategies are related to organizational change, others are more related to various communication strategies. For example, Waddington (2000) and Behrens et al. (2004) particularly emphasize the need to formulate a new agenda that appeals to groups that have traditionally been difficult to organize, with a particular focus on migrant labour and youth (Behrens et al. 2004; Waddington 2000). Migrant labour has been difficult to organize because of communication difficulties due to language barriers, and because of a lack of regular contact with these groups due to their precarious working conditions. Young people often have temporary or part-time employment and therefore do not consider union membership to be useful; furthermore, the union fee may be seen as too high, and many young people may not yet have experienced employment situations in which union membership would be beneficial. Using ICT, and particularly social media, to reach out to these groups and convince them to join a union has been described as an important revitalization strategy (Cockfield 2005; Dencik and Wilkin 2015; Fiorito et al. 2002; Murray 2017). Although research has indicated that unions have not been very successful in engaging with young people via the prime Web 1.0 tool of home pages (Bailey et al. 2010), Web 2.0 with its main feature of social media offers an entirely different potential for outreach. Our analysis will demonstrate whether and how unions in Sweden engage with young people via YouTube.

Another way to revitalize unions via social media is through an increasing focus on politics. It has been suggested that unions should increase their influence over policy-making, either by strengthening traditional ties between unions and political parties, or by seeking cooperation with other relevant political actors in civil society or on the supranational level (Behrens et al. 2004). This revitalization strategy suggests that trade unions should be more political—whether by mobilizing their own political campaigns, being active during elections or participating in cross-movement mobilization (i.e. common campaigns with other social movements). Cooperation with other social movements has been advocated as a way to make trade unions relevant again, although such cooperation often comes with a cost (Frege et al. 2014; Heery et al. 2012). Given the growing importance of social media in political campaigns, our analysis of trade union videos on YouTube will demonstrate whether and how unions have opted for this particular revitalization strategy.

Still, revitalization processes, like all organizational changes, challenge and alter the identity and image of a union. The simple fact that members are being lost implies that the organization is starting to think about itself as being weaker than it used to be. Furthermore, recruiting new groups changes the member composition of the union, which affects its identity. The constant trend towards individualization in post-industrial societies also poses challenges for trade unions. This trend is reinforced by social media, prompting scholars to talk about ‘connective’ rather than ‘collective’ actions (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). This trend might encourage unions to focus more on the individual benefits of their membership than on the traditional values of solidarity between workers. Moreover, it is known that emotional rather than purely informative messages are more likely to ‘go viral’ (Berger and Milkman 2012), which could affect the ways in which trade unions construct their self-image online. A content analysis of the videos that have been uploaded to YouTube will allow us to investigate how Swedish trade unions have reacted to these challenges, and to observe what kind of images these organizations promote of themselves and their members.

In sum, revitalization is crucial in order to bring the trade union movement out its current crisis, and revitalization strategies that use social media—in this case, videos uploaded to YouTube—are a good indicator of how unions are coping with this challenge.

## 1.2 WHY FOCUS ON YOUTUBE?

YouTube—or, more precisely, the website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)—was launched in February 2005 and quickly gained popularity. Today, with over 1.9 billion logged-in users per month worldwide, YouTube is one of the most-used Web 2.0 platforms and is arguably the third most frequently used webpage (after Google and Facebook). Most of these users are mere *consumers*: they watch (consume) the videos that have been uploaded on YouTube. On YouTube, the *producers* are those who actively produce content: they record and upload videos. YouTube producers consist of both amateur and professional participants, such as enterprises, organizations and social media influencers (‘YouTubers’); many groups and individuals professionally generate content for different purposes on social media (Burgess and Green 2009b; Lange 2007, p. 93). In this particular case, the Swedish trade unions are the YouTube producers. The most active YouTube users are

the *participants*—consumers who treat YouTube as social media and actively participate by commenting, sharing, liking and disliking already-uploaded videos. Of course, these categories overlap; for example, producers often actively participate as well.

Although YouTube was originally designed to allow individuals to share videos, the platform quickly became an important social networking medium (Burgess and Green 2009a, pp. 1–5). Today, YouTube is not only used for entertainment in the form of music videos, TV series and film; it is also used effectively to promote citizens' political online discussions and political campaigns (Auger 2013; English et al. 2011; Hanson et al. 2010), as well as used for educational purposes (Ha 2018). In addition to contributing to the relatively sparse research that exists on social movements and YouTube, we had three reasons for choosing YouTube as the social medium to examine when studying unions' revitalization strategies.

First, the vast majority of global YouTube users are below 44 years of age, even though the digital divide between age groups has decreased over time.<sup>1</sup> Users primarily turn to YouTube for entertainment. However, many consumers also look for informational and instructional videos (Khan 2017). It has been shown that YouTube videos have changed the ways in which young people seek information; for the younger generation, YouTube has developed into a major source of information (Stiegler 2009). Thus, for any organization, including trade unions, communication via YouTube provides an opportunity to reach a diverse—and, in particular, young—audience.

Facebook, another social media platform, also allows videos to be uploaded and supports live streaming. Many organizations make use of this opportunity, including trade unions. However, this Facebook feature is relatively recent and thus lacks sufficient data for a study of long-term organizational strategies. Facebook also lacks the autoplay function, which in YouTube automatically starts a new video after one has finished. This algorithm uses information about video tags (keywords that the producer adds to the video) and the user's previously watched videos. Thus, whereas on Facebook, unions would have to wait until someone shares their video, on YouTube, there is an excellent chance that their videos will be seen even without users actively searching for them. Moreover, YouTube users tend to be much younger than mainstream Facebook users (Ha 2018). Hence, if trade unions wish to catch the attention of young people, YouTube appears to be the preferable arena.



The second reason for our focus on YouTube is related to the *format* rather than to the audience. YouTube videos resemble film, which is a format that has been used by the labour movement to communicate messages to its members and to the public for the past 90 years. Unions have long used film as a means of agitating, dispersing information and exercising political activism (Hogekamp 1986; Moitra 2004; Vesterlund 2007, pp. 227f.). Eisenstein's silent film *Strike*, which was made in 1926 in the Soviet Union, and the silent film *Brüder*, which was made by Werner Hochbaum in 1929 in Germany, are both motion pictures that illustrate industrial action; in fact, the latter was produced by the trade union movement. Film became 'the medium of the working class' in the 1930s (Wring 2005, p. 35); thus, producing films for the cinema that contained the values of the labour movement was deemed an important way to construct a working-class identity. Unions also made political commercials early on in the history of film (Lindman 2011, pp. 192ff.), and the Swedish labour movement was no exception. From the 1920s onwards, the labour movement took a particular interest in using film for propaganda and to disperse the values of the movement. Trade unions started to produce their own motion pictures in the early 1930s, with two famous examples being *Chansen* (The chance) by the Union of Commercial Employees and *Järnets män* (The men of iron) by the Metal Workers' Union (Blomberg 2007). In sum, trade unions have a long tradition of film making and should therefore possess the necessary know-how for the production of YouTube videos. Moreover, videos do not require a verbal message, and this non-verbal form of communication makes it possible to overcome language barriers. Thus, YouTube can be an important channel for the transmission of union messages to non-native-language speakers, such as migrant labour groups.

Third, we focus on YouTube because videos uploaded to YouTube are a more stable form of communication than those on other social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. In addition, while Twitter only allows the use of 280 characters for its tweets (before 2017, only 140 characters were allowed), YouTube videos can be as long as twelve hours.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Twitter and Facebook updates are often responses to current events; thus, the use of these social media platforms is characterized by high speed and direct communication between members, the media or other actors.

The very nature of Facebook and Twitter would make their successful use dependent on the individual trade union official administering

the account—in other words, the use of these mediums is sensitive to the skill of particular individuals. In contrast, the YouTube videos produced by organizations are seldom a quick response to the comments of other actors. Video production is rarely a one-person job (Barber 2015); it is usually time consuming, and effort is required to write a script, prepare filming and execute the production of videos. It is also a costly process. Thus, it can be assumed that organizations producing videos on YouTube carefully consider the message they wish to convey, and that communication via YouTube is thus more likely than updates on Facebook or tweets to reveal an organization's long-term mobilization strategies and collective identity.

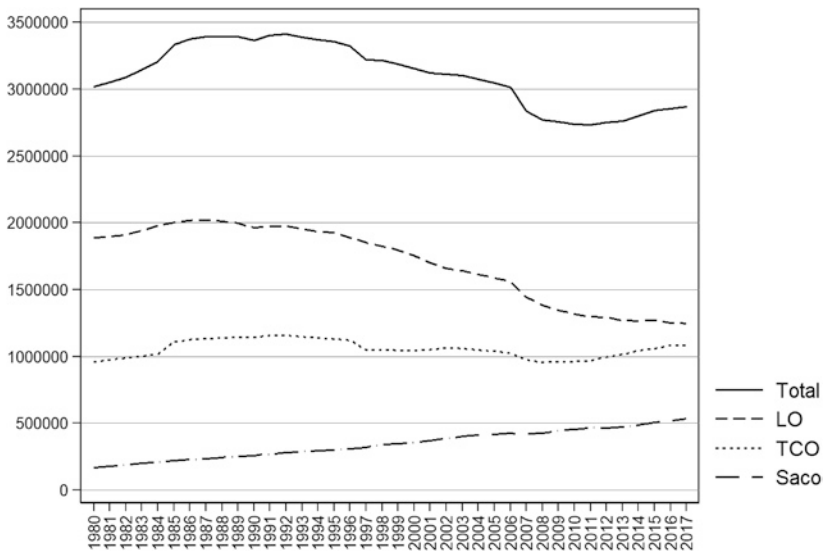
There is a certain platform bias towards Facebook and Twitter in the studies analysing unions' social media use (e.g. Panagiotopoulos and Barnett 2015; Rego et al. 2016). In particular, how unions use Twitter has been thoroughly analysed (e.g. Chivers et al. 2017; Dahlberg-Grundberg et al. 2016; Geelan and Hodder 2017; Hodder and Houghton 2015). Several studies on trade unions and social media do mention YouTube, albeit without focusing on this particular medium (e.g. Geelan 2013; Rego et al. 2016). The few studies that we are aware of describe how Australian trade unions document their activities (especially strikes) by uploading videos about various actions to YouTube (Milner 2012); these studies analyse film as a mobilization strategy and focus on how the production of YouTube videos by members helps to increase intra-union solidarity (Milner 2014). In this book, we will show that the use of YouTube by European and Swedish trade unions is actually not as rare as prior studies (or the lack thereof) may imply.

### 1.3 WHY FOCUS ON TRADE UNIONS IN SWEDEN?

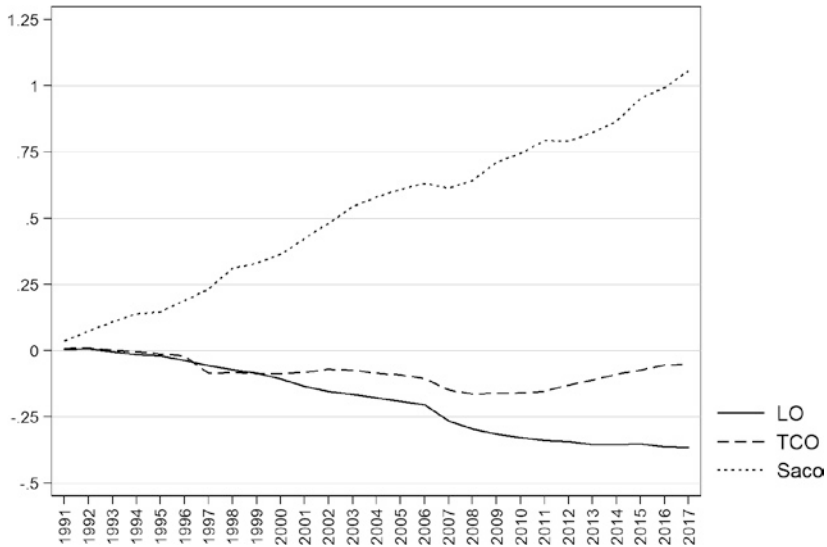
We use the Swedish trade union movement as the empirical case in our analysis of trade union revitalization on YouTube. We focus on Sweden for four reasons. First, although Swedish trade unions enjoy a comparatively high union density (approximately 70% of all Swedish employees are members of a trade union), they have experienced a rapid decline in the past twenty years (see more in Kjellberg 2011; Johansson and Magnusson 2012; Palm 2017). Thus, like their European counterparts, Swedish trade unions have an incentive to employ revitalization strategies. Although the number of union members increased somewhat in the early 1990s (Medlingsinstitutet 2016), the situation changed in the

mid-1990s and the decline escalated in the 2000s (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party lost its governmental powers after having governed Sweden for twelve consecutive years. The new centre-right government brought in a number of reforms to unemployment insurance and removed the tax deduction on trade union membership, resulting in a considerable increase in membership fees. As a consequence, union membership dropped rapidly in 2006–2007, which, according to the chairperson of the *Tjänstemännens centralorganisation* (TCO, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), ‘threatened the entire Swedish collective bargaining model’ (Nordmark 2013).

However, membership decline varies across the unions (Fig. 1.2), which leads to the second reason for choosing Sweden. Unlike many other countries, where employees with positions of different classes can be members of the same union (e.g. ver.di in Germany and UNISON in the UK), Swedish trade unions are divided into three major trade union confederations that represent different societal classes—the



**Fig. 1.1** Swedish trade union membership across three confederations and their affiliated unions over time (Source Medlingsinstitutet 2016; Kjellberg 2017)



**Fig. 1.2** Proportional change in union membership over time, using 1990 as a base (*Source* Kjellberg 2017)

working class, white-collar workers and the upper middle class (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2010; Kjellberg 2011).<sup>3</sup> The unions organizing the working class are affiliated with the *Landsorganisationen* (LO, the Trade Union Confederation); the unions representing white-collar workers are affiliated with the *Tjänstemännens centralorganisation* (TCO, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees); and the unions representing the upper middle class are affiliated with the *Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation* (Saco, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations). These three confederations coordinate 51 trade unions: the LO consists of 14 unions, the TCO organizes 14 unions and Saco organizes 23 unions.<sup>4</sup> Union density is higher in the public sector and is higher in middle-class unions than in working-class unions.

As shown in Figs. 1.1 and 1.2, the three confederations have been affected differently by the trade union crisis. Although it is not our goal to explain these varying declines in membership, it is worth noting that some of the differences between the unions in terms of membership losses reflect the changing structure of the labour market in Sweden

over the past thirty years. Deindustrialization has led to manual labour being replaced by the service sector; at the same time, rising educational levels have made the middle class bigger. While about 63% of employees belonged to the working class in 1985, this number had decreased to below 50% by 2015; during the same time period, the percentage of white-collar workers had increased from 17 to 23%, and the percentage of upper-middle-class workers had increased from 9 to 18% (Ahrne et al. 2018). Thus, in terms of potential trade union membership, the pool of people who can become members of TCO and Saco has increased, whereas the pool of people who can join traditional working-class unions has decreased over time. These figures are important to keep in mind when discussing the different revitalization strategies unions use on YouTube.

Changes in the economy and in the trade union structure can be viewed from a class perspective; as Figs. 1.1 and 1.2 show, the LO has lost the most members over time. This loss is partly an effect of the above-mentioned structural changes in the economy and partly a result of policy changes. The 2006–2007 reforms in unemployment insurance and membership fees affected different sectors differently. The fee for unemployment insurance is related to unemployment within the sector. Since unemployment and the risk of unemployment is higher among the working class than among white-collar workers and the upper middle class—a difference that became especially visible during the recession after the 2008 financial crisis (SCB 2017)—working-class trade union members have been left with higher fees than middle-class members. Similarly, removing the tax deduction on the trade union fee raised membership costs, which was obviously more noticeable for low-income earners in the working class.

The different confederations also responded differently to the sharp membership decline in 2006–2007. The unions took a series of measures to stop membership losses. In particular, the white-collar unions affiliated with the TCO mobilized. The TCO suffered from severe membership losses during the 1990s and 2000s, but has slowly managed to reverse this trend. After conducting a number of surveys to determine young people's perception of the union movement, the confederation launched the campaign *Facketförändras.nu* (The trade union movement is changing now) in the autumn of 2007. This campaign included major renewal processes in several TCO-affiliated unions that involved amalgamations, name changes and the hiring of PR and marketing companies

to rebrand the unions (Galli 2016, p. 157). No prior research describes similar actions being taken within the LO, even though the LO's membership declined considerably more than the TCO's. Finally, Saco has never experienced a 'crisis'. In contrast to the other organizations, the upper-middle-class unions in Sweden have grown incrementally over time. From the perspective of revitalization, these differences between the changes in Swedish trade union confederation membership numbers and changes in societal class structure provide a good basis to expect different usages of social media.

The third and fourth reasons for examining trade unions in Sweden are related to the spread of YouTube usage among the general population as well as within the labour movement. Sweden is one of the most digitalized countries in the European Union,<sup>5</sup> and 81% of the Swedish population over the age of 12 used social media occasionally in 2017, while 56% used it daily (Davidsson and Thoresson 2017, p. 41). Young Swedes are particularly active on YouTube: young people aged 12–25 use YouTube daily, and 85% of people aged 26–35 use YouTube at least every month (but often more frequently) (Davidsson and Thoresson 2017, p. 62). Men are slightly more active on YouTube than women (88% versus 80%), and people born outside of the Nordic countries are more active YouTube users than those born in Sweden or in other Nordic countries.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the groups of people that trade unions must reach and recruit are present on YouTube and can be targeted there.

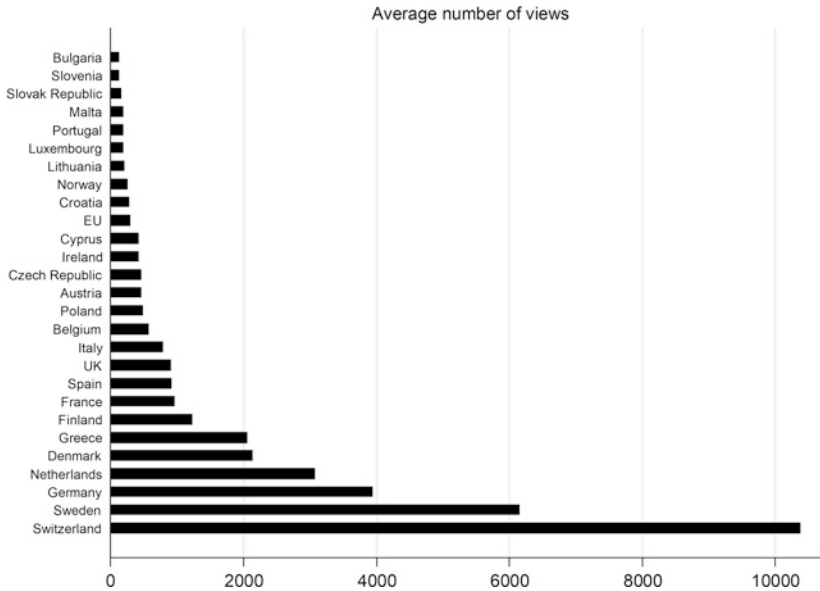
Finally, from a cross-national perspective, Swedish trade unions are active on YouTube. A comparison of the videos uploaded by all trade union confederations in the European Union, Switzerland and Norway during the period 2007–2017 revealed that trade union confederations in Sweden uploaded as many videos as larger countries such as the UK and Poland (Table 1.1). Although the number of videos posted by Swedish confederations is considerably lower than the numbers posted by confederations in Italy, France and Spain, Swedish confederations have a higher average number of views (Fig. 1.3); in this aspect, Sweden holds the second place after Switzerland (where confederations uploaded only fourteen very popular videos). Thus, Swedish confederations are not only active in uploading material, but also fairly successful in dispersing their videos, from a comparative perspective (see Jansson and Uba [2018] for further comparisons of videos uploaded by European confederations). Swedish unions are far from being typical European unions (due to their historically large membership and strong

**Table 1.1** Trade union confederations in the EU, Switzerland and Norway, and their representation on YouTube

	<i>Trade union density (2012)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Confederations</i>	<i>Channels</i>	<i>Videos posted in 2007–2017</i>
Italy	36.9	5	6	3519
France	7.7	5	6	1600
Spain	17.1	4	5	1514
Portugal	18.8	2	3	969
Poland	12.7	2	2	801
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>692</b>
UK	26	4	4	530
Cyprus	–	2	2	401
Germany	18.3	3	4	348
EU	–	2	2	273
Austria	28	1	4	269
Norway		2	3	252
Greece	22.8	2	2	250
Czech Rep.	14.3	3	4	139
Luxembourg	32.8	2	2	139
Ireland	31.2	1	1	118
Netherlands	17.9	1	1	114
Bulgaria	–	1	2	104
Croatia	–	2	2	96
Finland	69.8	2	2	95
Denmark	67.2	1	1	74
Lithuania	–	2	2	20
Switzerland	–	1	1	13
Belgium	55	1	2	10
Slovenia	22	1	1	9
Malta	–	2	2	7
Slovak Rep.	16.6	1	1	5

<sup>a</sup>Indicates OECD statistics; the remainder is the authors' data. No YouTube channels were found for trade union confederations in Estonia, Hungary, Latvia or Romania

bargaining power). From a European perspective, Swedish unions constitute the most likely case for this study; that is, if any unions in Europe are pursuing revitalization strategies on YouTube, they are most likely to be Swedish unions, given the number of videos Swedish unions have uploaded and their viewer statistics. The need for union revitalization is universal, and knowledge about how YouTube is used by Swedish unions could also be used to better understand developments elsewhere.



**Fig. 1.3** Average number of views per YouTube video per country and for the EU, 2007–2016 (*Source* Authors' data)

#### 1.4 THE ARGUMENT—AUDIENCES, MESSAGES AND SELF-IMAGE ACROSS UNIONS

It is clear that trade unions in Sweden are relatively active users of YouTube in a European context. In a way, this activity indicates that these unions have adopted the suggestion of revitalization scholars to use social media. However, we still lack knowledge of *how* they use social media. Prior studies mainly emphasize that ICT should be used for revitalization without analysing how this is done. Purely being present on social media, which in this case entails the ownership of a channel or uploading videos to YouTube, is not enough to accomplish trade union renewal, however. Rather, the literature on trade union revitalization indicates the importance of unions using social media to engage with and organize particular audiences, conveying the right messages to those audiences and presenting self-images that appeal to those groups. These aspects are yet to be examined. Moreover, the trade union movement is



heterogeneous, and there are reasons to expect differences in how unions representing different social classes use social media. It is clear that differing class compositions ought to affect the ways in which unions use social media, because the audiences of these unions—that is, the members and potential members—have different educational backgrounds, different Internet habits and perhaps even different opportunities to use social media. Unions representing different classes have also had different experiences with the trade union crisis and membership decline. Thus, a comparison of working-class, white-collar workers’ and upper-middle-class unions not only makes sense, but can also provide important information about the trade union landscape in the twenty-first century.

The following chapters of this book investigate how unions representing different social classes use this popular social media channel for revitalization purposes. We provide evidence for our arguments by building on existing research on trade union revitalization and empirically investigating whether and how Swedish unions (1) engage with and organize more diverse groups, (2) employ political campaigns, and (3) pursue image management via YouTube videos.

Thus, the second chapter aims to investigate *audiences*. If the Swedish trade unions use YouTube for revitalization, they are expected to address new audiences with their videos—particularly young people, people with atypical employment contracts and people born outside of the Nordic countries. These groups have been underrepresented in trade unions in general, including Swedish trade unions. As already noted, the membership decline and subsequent need for revitalization differs between unions. Hence, we expect differences in the ways the three trade union confederations—the LO, the TCO and Saco—and their affiliated trade unions address potential audiences via YouTube. For example, we expect working-class unions to be particularly active in trying to reach out to young people, immigrants and persons with atypical employment contracts, since these groups often (but not always) belong to the working class: young people usually have their first work experience in unqualified jobs where no education is required, migrant workers are often found in working-class jobs (e.g. construction and the service sector) and atypical contracts are more common among working-class jobs.

Similarly, regarding variations in addressing audiences, which is the focus of Chapter 3, we expect the unions affiliated with the three different confederations to communicate different *messages* via their YouTube videos. It is likely that different issues are of different importance to

different groups and social classes; more specifically, we expect to observe different degrees of political activism from the different confederations. Working-class unions have always had political aims and thus conveyed political messages; in most countries, there has been an institutionalized cooperation between unions and labour parties (Allern and Bale 2017). The latter is also true in the Swedish case, where the LO still cooperates with the Social Democratic Party. However, white-collar unions and upper-middle-class unions have been very reluctant to cooperate with specific parties and have cherished a ‘politically neutral’ image.

Finally, the union crisis and revitalization strategies are challenging prevalent identities in trade unions. Any changes in membership composition—both gains and losses—will affect what the organization is and how it perceives itself. All organizations have unique identities, and the self-image they display is crucial for member identification with the organization and membership recruitment. By focusing on the *self-images* the unions communicate via social media, we highlight the challenges union renewal has brought to the unions. Two dimensions of a union’s image are of particular importance for membership recruitment: (1) the degree to which the union presents itself as an inclusive or exclusive organization and (2) the degree to which the union expresses the values of collectivism or individualism. We expect these dimensions to play different roles for the different classes.

Analysing the audiences of, and the messages and self-images communicated by, the trade unions’ YouTube videos allows us to not only present a thorough analysis of the social media communication patterns of trade unions in Sweden, but also describe the contemporary trade union movement. The following chapters demonstrate how Swedish unions have accomplished these tasks.

## 1.5 DATA COLLECTION, CODING AND ANALYSIS METHODS

The analysis presented in this book is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 4535 YouTube videos uploaded by almost all the Swedish trade unions between January 2007 and December 2016.<sup>7</sup> In addition to almost all being active on YouTube, all of the Swedish unions have webpages. All but two have Facebook accounts, all but eight have Twitter accounts and many are also present on Instagram. Ninety-one YouTube channels are directly or indirectly related to Swedish unions.

Our quantitative analysis is based on YouTube metadata—more specifically, on all the data that could be scraped using the YouTube application programming interface (API) in January 2017. Details of this process and the data are described in the Appendix; here, it suffices to note that this metadata provided detailed information (i.e. title, upload date, duration, short description of the video provided by the union, number of views, number of likes, number of dislikes and number of comments) for all the videos uploaded to our pre-selected trade union channels up to the specific date of data collection (31 January 2017). Since mediums like YouTube focus on users providing content, YouTube’s metadata production is also a bottom-up process in which the producers of the material decide how they want to present it (Stiegler 2009, p. 52).

Focusing on YouTube metadata will reveal patterns regarding what trade unions post on YouTube in terms of length, timing, content and so forth. Metadata on views, likes and dislikes will also provide some information on the audience’s responses to the videos, making it possible to move beyond a traditional content-based media analysis. Of course, the number of views is not a reliable measure of a video’s popularity, since viewers can click on a video without watching it or watch the video but not rate it positively (i.e. not click ‘like’). Although YouTube viewers are given the option to choose ‘dislike’, this is not very frequently used. We did not analyse written comments from the audience because our interviews with the people responsible for the unions’ social media accounts stated that they (irregularly) remove comments that are perceived as disturbing (mostly racist and sexist comments). Thus, analysing the remaining comments would not reflect the full picture of the audience’s views. Still, the metadata and content analysis provide some insight into how unions use YouTube and how their audience responds to their videos. The metadata and analysis are particularly useful for demonstrating the differences between the three Swedish trade union confederations.

Table 1.2<sup>8</sup> summarizes the collected information for all three trade union confederations. The LO and its affiliated unions uploaded the greatest number of videos, but since the confederations differ in size considerably, a relative measure paints a different picture. It is clear that the Saco-affiliated unions have the greatest number of videos per member (0.003), while the white-collar unions affiliated with TCO have the lowest number of videos per member (0.001), and the LO-affiliated unions fall between (0.002). The variation in the average duration,

number of views and number of likes suggests that there are significant differences in the videos uploaded by the different unions. For example, Saco uploads videos that are an average of four times longer than those uploaded by the LO, and this pattern has not changed over time (Table 1.2 and Fig. 1.4<sup>9</sup>). This finding indicates differences in content in the video uploads of the different confederations. As the following chapters will reveal, one explanation for the differences in duration is that Saco has uploaded many videos of conferences and workshops on issues related to specific professions; in contrast, the longest videos uploaded by the LO and the TCO are reports from the unions' congresses.

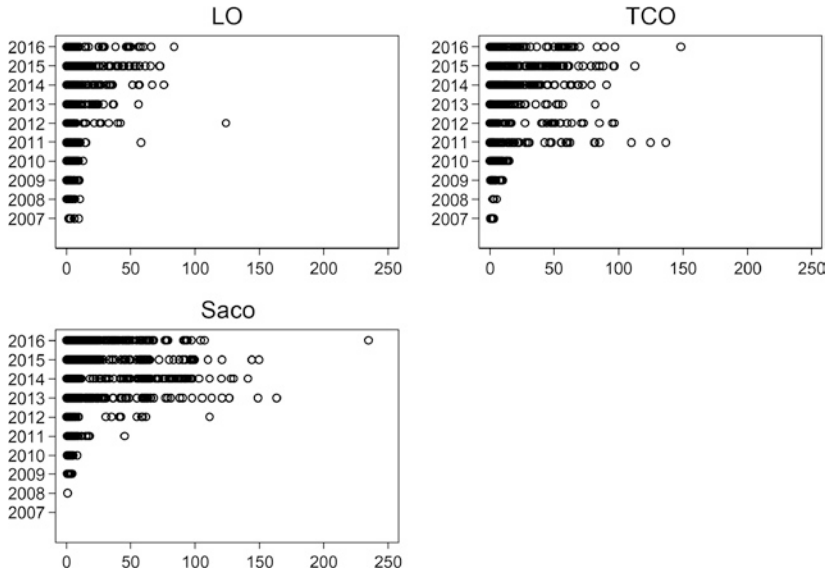
The main empirical analysis of this book investigates the videos' audiences, messages and self-images and is carried out in two phases:

First, we apply a simple content analysis to the metadata. Taking the literature on trade union revitalization as our point of departure, we identify a number of words that we suggest reveal the audiences and messages. We then search for this combination of words in the metadata (video title and description). For example, to determine which videos address young people, we look for the use of words such as 'youth', 'young', 'summer job', 'student' and so forth. To detect messages referring to political activism, we use an inductive method instead of relying on predefined theoretical categories, namely "the word cloud analysis" (see appendix for details). Since we do not rely on surveys with representatives of the unions, we do not examine the unions' intentions in making the videos; rather, we try to assess the audiences, based on the topics discussed and the actors mentioned. This method allows us to see patterns in the vast quantity of

**Table 1.2** Number of videos per trade union confederation (total population—large N set)

<i>Trade union confederation</i>	<i>No. of unions</i>	<i>No. of members in 2016</i>	<i>No. of YouTube channels</i>	<i>No. of videos studied</i>	<i>Mean duration (min)</i>	<i>Mean number of views</i>	<i>Mean number of likes</i>
LO	15	1,446,000	27	1809	4.42	2663	2.75
TCO	10	1,382,300	39	1347	9.57	2157	3.03
Saco	15	516,000	25	1379	18.11	735	1.44
Total	40		91	4535	10.11	1927	2.44

Source Medlingsinstitutet (2017), the authors' data



**Fig. 1.4** Average duration (min) of uploaded videos across confederations by year

material, as certain words and topics may change over time and may vary between trade union confederations. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that such an ‘automated’ content analysis is vague and has several limitations. For example, young people do not necessarily watch videos that include the word ‘youth’ in their title, and all videos containing the word ‘youth’ in the title and description may not be directed towards ‘youth’ specifically. Therefore, in order to complement our simplified method, we also performed a more detailed analysis of a smaller sample of videos.

The second phase of our data collection and analysis was a qualitative approach involving two kinds of coding processes. First, we made a stratified random selection of 624 videos for further analysis. The aim was to choose 20% of the videos that were shorter than 15 minutes from each confederation (see descriptive data in Table 1.3). This length limit was set because longer videos are mainly about seminars, workshops and congresses, which are not our primary interest. As Saco had many videos lasting more than 20 minutes (25% of their videos), we ended up with

**Table 1.3** Number of videos per trade union confederation in the small N (624) set

<i>Trade union confederation</i>	<i>No. of videos studied</i>	<i>Mean duration (min)</i>	<i>Mean number of views</i>	<i>Mean number of likes</i>
LO	335	2.15	1607	1.3
TCO	185	3	1950	1.39
Saco	104	3.81	896	2.88
<i>Total</i>	<i>624</i>	<i>2.99</i>	<i>1477</i>	<i>1.58</i>

*Source* Authors' data

a distribution in which the LO had 335 videos, the TCO had 185 videos and Saco had only 104 videos. The fact that Saco uploaded many long videos that are unlikely to have a wide audience (also see Fig. 1.4) suggests that in addition to communication, unions use YouTube as a medium to archive various film material.<sup>10</sup>

A research assistant applied a predefined coding scheme and used the visual, audio and text information for each video to identify specific topics and characters in the videos (the codebook is available in the Appendix). There were a variety of video types, with differing content and actors. For example, some videos showed interviews with union leaders, who summarized recent policy decisions taken by the union (e.g. Byggnads 2014, June 14); others showed political campaigns that were mobilized in relation to national elections (e.g. LO 2014, April 28); other videos presented new collective agreements (e.g. Fackförbundet-ST 2010, October 15); and some described how to write a CV (e.g. Civilekonomerna 2013, October 22).

The videos were categorized based on genre (i.e. advertisement, cartoon, report, coverage of congresses or interviews), main content (e.g. educational material, political campaign, protest action, call for membership or information distribution for current members), main actor (e.g. regular member, leader or politician), location shown in video (e.g. office, factory or natural environment), or addressee (e.g. young people, members of the unions) and issue discussed in the video (e.g. wages, gender equality, international solidarity, unemployment insurance, or collective agreement and bargaining). This small set of videos is fully described in the Appendix, and the audiences and messages are described in Chapters 2 and 3. However, it is worth noting here that 45% of these videos are various kinds of interviews, 10% are clear advertisements for

union membership and 14% are various reports on trade union events such as conferences, competitions and seminars. The careful categorization and coding of the data in the small N set provided a detailed picture of the videos and operated as a control for the robust coding of the metadata.

Finally, in order to further improve the understanding of the content of the videos, the fourth chapter contains an in-depth qualitative analysis of the self-images of the union movement that are portrayed on YouTube. In this final empirical chapter, we focus on two trade unions from each confederation, for a total of six unions. For each confederation, we examine one large union organizing employees in the industrial (private) sector and one large union organizing employees in the public sector. We provide an in-depth analysis of 10–12 videos for each of these six unions. All the analysed videos in this section have many views and contain information on the union that permits an analysis of self-images.

## 1.6 OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Analysing how trade unions use YouTube leads to a better understanding of how contemporary unions act and behave in the digital era. It is a way of detecting what audiences appear to be targeted by unions, what issues dominate union videos' messages and what kind of mobilization unions encourage in the (digital) public sphere. The video titled 'How to get a raise in 47 seconds', which was produced by the Municipal Workers' Union, is a good example of the videos analysed in this book: it targets the general public, raises the issue of equal payment, refers to the general problem of gender inequality and calls for further action from everyone, not just from the members of the union that produced the video. All these topics are covered in the following chapters.

We start by investigating the videos' audiences. Thus, Chapter 2 asks and answers the question of whether Swedish trade unions use YouTube to target groups that have been difficult to organize—namely, youth, people with a foreign background and people with precarious employment. We find distinct differences across the confederations in terms of the targeting of certain audiences. For example, the Saco-affiliated unions are relatively successful at targeting potential members. A striking observation is that all the unions use YouTube to disperse information to members (and non-members) about union work such as congresses and collective bargaining.

The third chapter focuses on the messages that are expressed in the videos, and demonstrates that unions discuss a significant variety of issues on YouTube. Even though political activism is more present (as expected) in the videos uploaded by working-class unions (the LO), all the unions use YouTube to enhance internal democracy and to target their own members.

While Chapters 2 and 3 examine how unions choose to use different revitalization strategies on YouTube—such as diversifying the membership base and becoming politically active—Chapter 4 describes how the need for revitalization has challenged the unions, and how this challenge is reflected in their self-images. Chapter four's in-depth analysis of videos from six unions reveals that collectivism is still strong in the LO- and Saco-affiliated unions. However, whereas social identities such as class and gender are particularly important in the former, the profession is central for the latter. Among the TCO unions, individualism is used as the basis for mobilization.

## NOTES

1. Specific demographics for YouTube users on a global scale are difficult to find. There are plenty of numbers for specific countries, however. Here, we use Swedish survey-based data from “YouTube and Swedes.” <https://www.iis.se/blogg/youtube-och-svenskarna-i-siffror/>, along with the report “Social Media Use in 2018” that was published by the Pew Research Centre. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/> (accessed 8 October 2018).
2. Initially, the length of the videos was a maximum of ten minutes, but the rule was changed in 2010. As of 2018, it is possible to upload videos of up to fifteen minutes in length without verifying a YouTube account; after verification, it is possible to upload videos of up to twelve hours in length.
3. There are somewhat contradictory arguments about the development of this division; Kjellberg (2011) argues that unions follow the class structure of society, while Ahrne et al. (2018) disagree, and suggest that the difference between working-class and white-collar workers, which is actually disappearing in contemporary Swedish society, is only emphasized because of this particular difference in trade union structure.



4. Most Swedish trade unions are affiliated with one of the three confederations. However, there are a few exceptions, including the Dockers' Union and the Syndicalist Union (SAC).
5. According to Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR), Sweden is third after Denmark and Finland, see more at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi> (accessed 16 October 2017).
6. Further details on Swedish YouTube users can be found on the homepage of The Internet Foundation in Sweden, and especially in Pamela Davisson's article from 13 February 2017, titled "Youtube och svenskarna i siffror." <https://www.iis.se/blogg/youtube-och-svenskarna-i-siffror/> (accessed 15 August 2018).
7. There are only a few non-affiliated unions in Sweden (the Swedish Longshoremen's Union, the Swedish Pilots' Association and the syndicalist union, SAC). These are very small and were excluded from the analysis.
8. Note that the three confederations also produce their own videos; therefore, the number of unions shown for the LO (15) is greater than the total number of its affiliated unions (14). Five TCO- and nine Saco-affiliated unions have no YouTube channels.
9. In all the figures in this book, 'the LO' refers to the LO and its affiliated unions, 'the TCO' refers to the TCO and its affiliated unions and 'Saco' refers to Saco and its affiliated unions.
10. This argument was supported by interviews with the trade union officials responsible for social media at the TCO and the LO.

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