Negotiated participation

Social media logics and the orientation, conversation, and resistance of participation

by

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Summary

Over the last twenty years, social media have grown into prominent information and communication platforms. Scholars have provided great insight into these platforms' role to people's participation. Theories about the logics of these platforms have furthermore emerged to understand how their 'rules' impact production, distribution, and consumption. Few studies have, however, investigated the relationship between participation and social media logics. This dissertation investigates how social media logics influence participation, showing how social media logics theory serves to explore tensions between people and platforms further. It mobilizes three qualitative studies for this purpose, each representing one form of participation: orientation, conversation, and resistance. The studies investigate people's usage and perceptions of social media as societal spaces; rhetorical genres in public issue conversations; and counter-public formations through personalized content feeds. I use these studies to discuss how participation is negotiated and moulded against social media logics as people avoid, adapt to, and utilize such logics. Certain kinds of participation may also be invited by social media logics. One such kind is orientation, which may be a pivotal form of participation while also representing a challenge to participation as a concept. Social media logics may further contribute to the mainstreaming of anti-democratic and radical voices which aim to counter the claims and legitimacy of democratic counter-publics, and invite non-reciprocity in online conversations.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

There is general agreement in scholarship that early celebrations of the internet's potential to bring about a revolutionary turn in egalitarian and engaged democracy were too optimistic (Chadwick, 2009; Lindgren, 2017; Quandt, 2018; 2023). Social media, in particular, were thought to democratize the internet, strengthening people's abilities to participate in public discussions and to orient themselves towards the larger public (NOU 2022: 9). However, research has shown that social media has also provided spaces for hate and manipulation (Quandt, 2018), that people hide on or restrict social media due to privacy concerns (Xie & Karan, 2019; Demertzis et al., 2021), or wish to switch off from social media to alleviate stress and improve their wellbeing (Dutt, 2023). To many Norwegians, social media are not seen as arenas fit for public discussion (Moe et al., 2019). Approximately 15% of Norway's population claim to participate in online discussions about societal issues (SSB, 2022). Concerns that social media increase polarization in the public (NOU 2022: 9) towards irreconcilable worldviews (Arora et al., 2022) further illustrate the perceived challenges of how social media restrict people's connection to the public at large.

Social media platforms continue as prominent spaces for information and communication practices to the Norwegian public (Ipsos, 2023; Moe & Bjørgan, 2023) and beyond (Newman et al., 2023), alongside longstanding criticisms concerning the damaging effects of

such for-profit online spaces. To critics, the development of a commercialized internet poses severe challenges to public sphere ideals of a reciprocal and informed citizenry (e.g., Jensen, 2007; Pariser, 2011; Fuchs, 2021). People's interactions and behaviors on social media platforms are generated, tracked, analyzed, and aggregated as data for economic purposes (Jensen & Helles, 2017). Predicting social media users' preferences, social media platforms tailor and optimize users' information environment in a competition for their attention (Goldhaber, 2006) – a scarce and often considered irreplaceable commodity (Gillespie, 2010; Webster, 2014). At the same time, third party businesses and actors acquire the preferred audiences for their advertisements and goals, based on complex analytics of behaviors and political and ideological orientations (Demertzis et al., 2021). Organizing people's participation and content feeds is pivotal to this creation of tailored audiences, as well as to keep people's presence and attention (Gillespie, 2018). Social media's algorithms and architecture are designed for these profit-seeking purposes (Gillespie, 2018) in order to connect and utilize people's behaviors for economic gain (van Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). While social media provide tools and sites for participation – functioning as carriers of people's utterances, providing spaces where people can observe, learn, and express themselves, and as disseminators of news and entertainment – social media platforms also analyze and utilize these practices and communications for their own and other's ends (Langlois & Elmer, 2013).

The factors underlying whether and how participation plays out on social media are numerous and complex (e.g., Laurison, 2015; Moe et al., 2019). Social media logics and platform-specific features, for instance, play parts in how social media participation emerge and unfold as they shape communicative options and environments of platforms (e.g., van Dijck, 2013; Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2020). Social media logics describe the principles of, or 'rules' for, how information and communication is handled on social media, including how it is produced, distributed, and consumed (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). While social media logics has particularly been used as theoretical lens when analyzing the strategies and practices of actors such as journalists or political parties and politicians seeking people's attention on social media, this thesis highlights the relationship between social media logics and people's participation.

To understand this dynamic, I depart from Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) four summarizing principles– programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication – synthesized with nuances and assumptions as outlined by Klinger and Svensson (2015; 2016; 2018). Through the avenue of social media logics, the analyses undertaken here inform "the way in which the communicative spaces relevant for democracy are broadly configured" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 149). Connecting social media logics to participatory practices informs how social media platforms function as spaces for the democratic conversation. This thesis also informs scholarship emphasizing that certain participatory forms are, in particular, invited on social media

platforms. Therefore, inquiring into participation on social media requires a broad conceptualization of participation (e.g., Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Normative assumptions about participation inherent to the democratic deliberative tradition can be traced throughout the constitution of Norway (e.g., Kalleberg, 2016; NOU 2022: 9). However, research has demonstrated that ideals of equal, free, flourishing and unconstrained participation have not been reached online (Chadwick, 2009; Quandt, 2023).

As this thesis will demonstrate (see Chapter 5), people's social media engagements can be understood as *negotiated* participation practices. People variously adapt to, utilize, or are avoidant towards social media logics. Adaption entails not only that people accept social media logics through their presence on social media platforms – as this may support logics of datafication and induce connectivity – but, in addition, that people explicitly provide information by producing content, including personal revelations and expressions (cf. Klinger & Svensson, 2015). Utilization, on the other hand, entails taking advantage of and playing along with social media logics to, for example, reach a larger audience and acquire attention (cf. Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Lastly, avoidance describes how people avoid practices inherent to sustain social media logics, such as leaving visible interaction traces for algorithmic handling and distribution.

My research thus informs how social media logics influence participation. This 'influence' is interconnected with and is dependent

on people's use of social media and their action possibilities. By using 'influence', instead of, for instance, 'impact' or 'shape', I suggest that social media logics are not deterministic forces, nor are logics the main explanatory factor as to how people participate on social media. Social media logics do not inevitably steer, or necessarily shape, certain kinds of participation. Rather, I argue that social media logics may, alongside other factors, *influence* participation. The findings of this thesis also support the notion that participation on social media is neither 'new' or 'old', but multifaceted. Participation entails different practices which people variously (do not) engage in (Hustinx et al., 2012; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). While social media logics describe general principles inherent to prominent social media platforms, the ways that different social media emphasize different aspects of social media logics also influence participation on these different platforms. Social media platforms are designed to keep people active and present on platforms in a competitive platform economy. This thesis thus contributes to the social media logics literature by identifying connections between social media logics and the users that encounter these very logics when using social media (van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

1.2 Participation and (some of) its sensitizing concepts

In this thesis, I focus on citizen participation, that is, forms of civic engagement, on social media. Here, participation is seen as the voluntary

and active orientation to and partaking in the democratic conversation (Carpentier, 2011).[1] The democratic conversation is understood as conversations about and expressions concerning already established and recognized public matters (i.e., issues that citizens agree are public problems and, therefore, relevant for the public to discuss and find solutions to) as well as conversations and expressions engaging in contests about *what counts as* public matters. The democratic conversation is thus not one singular discussion or a place that can be physically found. It reveals itself throughout societies, in, for example, mediated discussions, public meetings, and artistic performances. Participation is here understood as the orientation and partaking in this non-placeable and non-confined democratic conversation. This thesis thus relies on a maximalist concept of the term (e.g., Carpentier, 2011), seeing public matters and 'the political' as non-constant and continuously shaped.

In general, definitions of participation tend to include an explicit commitment to change or influence (Gamble & Weil, 1995) or emphasize active partaking in decision-making (Pateman, 1970). The broad definition employed in this thesis includes such practices, but does not limit participatory practices to the explicit aim for change or influence, or partaking in decision making, thus recognizing that

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[1] This operationalization in other words means that participation is conceptualized beyond traditional civic participation forms such as petition signing, attending particular demonstrations or protests, volunteering for social/political causes, membership in (or partaking in activities organized by) official organizations or groups that are concerned with social or political issues, contacting politicians in office (Edgerly et al., 2018), and political consumerism (Stolle et al., 2005).

participatory practices are "complex and hardly straightforward" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013, p. 267). A broader definition of participation must also be sensitive to the practices that occur when people make up their minds, learn, and negotiate about issues that are relevant to society at large, without being at a point of attempting to reach a decision based on already formed opinions (see, for example, Kjeldsen, 2016; 2018). According to the definition used in this thesis, one does not have to be publicly expressive to participate. This definition thus includes participation forms that are "only minimal" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013, p. 267). It thus requires the recognition that participation forms may have different "intensities" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013, p. 267). Although this definition is useful to understand participation on social media platforms, it also poses some challenges as it does not set distinct boundaries as to what is, and as to what is not, participation (see Chapter 5). By mobilizing this definition, however, this thesis ensures sensitivity to the multifacetedness of participation.

To narrow this broad conceptualization of participation down, the aim of which is to situate participation in the realm of social media platforms, three sensitizing concepts are chosen for the objects of research, namely: conversation, orientation, and resistance. Derived from theory, previous research[2], and findings, the function of the

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[2] For example, while these concepts represent participation across technologies, see, for example, Edgerly and colleagues (2018) for a similar operalization of "online political participation", as commenting, sending messages, sharing, and expressions.

sensitizing concepts is to provide a "sense of reference" and "guidance in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7) of participation. They reflect the broad definition of participation as employed in this thesis. They do not claim or intend to cover participation at large but focus on certain participation forms. The sub-studies each inform one sensitizing concept, and allows for an exploration of three areas through which participation can be analyzed on social media platforms:

(1) How public conversations on social media play out

(2) How people understand and use social media beyond what can be seen in visible interaction traces

(3) How personalization may support the creation of different publics on social media

Figure 1 illustrates the approach:

Figure 1: The research design
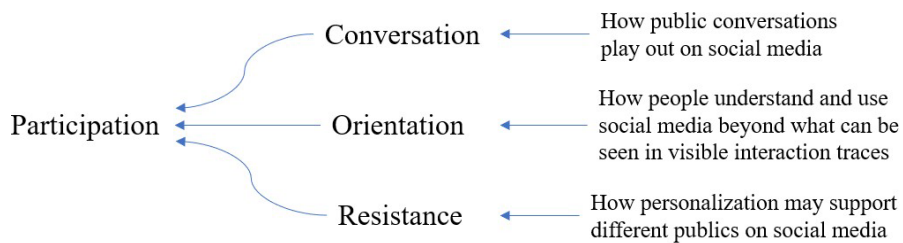
The sub-studies shed light on how social media logics influence these avenues of participation on social media platforms. Together, this influence is described as emanating in *negotiated participation*.

1.3   Research questions

This thesis contributes to research that investigates social media platforms in a participatory perspective to explore and understand tensions between people and social media platforms. Specifically, it focuses on the – not yet empirically investigated – relationship between social media logics and participation. I employ qualitative methods for this purpose. The main research question is:

How do social media logics influence participation on social media platforms?

The sub-research questions are all designed to capture one distinct area of participation through which the relationship between participation and social media logics may be explored (conversation, orientation, and resistance), and specify the boundaries drawn to answer the main research question. Articles comprise the empirical contributions of this thesis. The findings from each article is understood through one sensitizing concept. How the three sub-studies relate to each other, as

well as the choice and utilization of sensitizing concepts, is outlined in Chapter 4. The first article asks:

What rhetorical genres are used when participants are engaged in conversations about public issues on Instagram?

This question guides the exploration of (1) how (visible) public conversations unfold in comment sections on Instagram - a social media platform that has not yet been sufficiently considered in this regard, and (2) how rhetorical genres can be used as analytical lenses when looking beyond democratic deliberation principles. The contribution of this study is to further understand different public conversations and to theorize their societal function (e.g., Harris & Werner, 2021). While research has identified epideictic rhetoric in Facebook comment sections (Andersen, 2020), and in tweets (Vatnøy, 2017), such findings cannot automatically be transferred to Instagram. Furthermore, forensic rhetoric is still scarcely considered in online communication research.

While the first article looks at visible interaction traces, I also look beyond what is visible and public on social media. The second article asks:

How do social media natives use social media as social and public spaces?

This question investigates how people that are likely to be accustomed to social media as spaces for socialization and information describe their social media usage. It analyzes what cannot easily be grasped by looking merely at visible traces of interaction. The investigation thus enables inquiring into perceptions and negotiations of barriers in public sphere arenas that are relevant to public participation. Scholars have explored how people variously and contingently use social media (e.g., Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009; Horvát & Hargittai, 2021), how people perceive and negotiate privacy and risk on social media (e.g., Fulton & Kibby, 2017), and participate in private closed-off spaces (e.g., Yeshua-Katz & Hård af Segerstad, 2020). Social media platforms are, however, continuously evolving, and people are increasingly accustomed to social media's presence in social and public life. Studying perceptions and use of social media thus represent a continuously pertinent research area. Investigating how practices are tied to assumptions of, and experiences, for example, with virality and datafication, demonstrates how such platforms provide communicative spaces with certain constraints and opportunities. As of now, no studies have tied people's reasonings and perceptions about social media platforms to social media logics.

When aiming to explore participation on social media, research should look beyond mainstream conversations and majority perceptions. This may particularly inform participatory potentials and barriers. The situated issues and voices of individuals and groups in minority positions are often not naturally assumed as parts of mainstream conversations. The third article asks:

Do TikTok's personalization algorithms support the construction of counter-publics, and if so, how may such publics materialize in its personalized content feed?

This question provides an entry point to understand how TikTok's personalization algorithms shape communicative 'sides' on the platform; specifically, how we can understand the relationship between content feed developments and the formation of counter-publics. While scholarship debunks deterministic notions of 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers' (e.g., Bruns, 2019a), TikTok's unprecedented algorithmic prediction and sorting, and the proliferation of content creators proclaiming positions of 'resistance' against society's beliefs or norms while benefitting from "viralization" (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020), raises questions about how we can understand social media's support to different publics. The study demonstrates how TikTok's algorithmic personalization supports counter-public formations, while its virality-enhancing mechanisms makes them open to growth, and visible to

outsiders. It especially introduces and discusses the notion of anti-democratic counter-publics in this regard.

Together, these three qualitative studies give insight into the relationship between social media logics and people's participation, providing an answer to the main research question. This thesis thus prioritizes depth over breadth. To that end, I engage in the social media logics literature through qualitative studies mobilized to grasp nuances, understanding, and occasionally, new revelations. I argue that recognizing the relationship between participation and social media logics is crucial as social media platforms provide spaces for individuals' interactions and connection to the larger public. That is, its logics are not just relevant to attention-seeking actors such as politicians and journalists. Social media logics are also relevant to people's participatory practices on social media as their logics shape social media platforms as communicative spaces. In this thesis, I thus seek to outline some instances where the relationship between participation and social media logics can be understood. I do not aim to cover or establish this relationship in its entirety, not do I claim to measure degree or causality. Rather, I deep-dive into three sets of materials to facilitate further understanding of this topic.

Participation on social media consists of a myriad of things such as liking, commenting a single '@' in a comment section, or sharing a post to a private audience of a few friends. Participation on social media cannot be established conclusively as all social media platforms,

including their features and action possibilities, continuously develop, and as individuals and their assumptions, perceptions, and practices also matter as to how participation evolves. Delimitations in a study such as this thus concern a multitude of social media interactions, usages, and participatory realities. Participation as a concept is not static, even beyond the social media realm, and can materialize through a number of activities. It is these intricacies that are acknowledged and worked with in this thesis, enabling a sensitive approach to make explicit *some* of the ways in which the relationship between participation and social media logics can be understood.

1.4   Presentation of the articles

The first article is titled "*Talking Facts and Establishing (In)justice: Discussing Public Matters on Instagram*". Here I ask what rhetorical genres are used when participants are engaged in conversations about public issues on Instagram. The article focuses on a particular kind of participation – conversation – on a social media platform scarcely examined in terms of public conversation. The article answers to widespread concern about social media's role to individuals' alleged lack of interaction with differently minded people, and lack of interest in common understandings of the world (Michaildou & Trenz, 2021; Su et al., 2022), fueling discussions about "post-truth" and public polarization (van der Linden et al., 2020; Ambrosio, 2022). This study contributes qualitative insight into how public conversations on social media may

materialize with regards to these concerns. Conversations' conditions and functions are here operationalized as the societal role of conversations that consist of characteristics found in rhetorical genres. It points out how the forensic genre, in particular, is generally overlooked in online conversation research.

The article employs a perspective which considers that a broad range of communication forms contribute to shaping the democratic conversation at large. It looks at comment sections under four Instagram posts published by two public figures, thus simultaneously shedding light on how and which engagement may be garnered on social media platforms such as Instagram. At the time of data collection, the public figures had created controversies in the Norwegian public often due to their Instagram activities (seen in mainstream media coverage, and in online tv-shows). Article 1 provides an in-depth analysis of 400 comments, drawn from a larger corpus of 4760 comments. It mobilizes thematic analysis for this purpose. In the article, I describe how the analysis finds ontological contests – that participants in the comment sections are concerned with what is true – and moral positionings of self and other. I furthermore describe how such proclamations of truthness or falsehood are used in prescriptions of guilt and innocence. Theoretical reasoning emerges as an overarching trait in the comment' sections, through characteristics inherent to the forensic rhetorical genre. From this I discuss the implications of a simultaneous presence of characteristics inherent to the epideictic rhetorical genre. The article thus highlights the urgency of identifying, and aiming to further understand,

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circumstances in which irreconcilable truth positions rhetorically resting on blaming 'the other' for moral violations emerge.

In this thesis, I consider these findings through the sensitizing concept of conversation, and how findings inform how public conversations may unfold when taking place in the communicative environment shaped by social media logics. In Chapter 5, I discuss how the analysis uncovers how certain conversations may be prompted by social media logics. I argue that emphases on personalization and movement especially can help understand tendencies in the comment sections. That is, the composition of the rhetorical genres' characteristics as demonstrated in the article.

The second article is titled "*Social Media Natives' Invisible Online Spaces: Proposing the Concept of Digital Gemeinschaft 2.0*". In this article, I investigate people's evaluations and experiences of social media, including their reasons for potential negotiations or strategies. How people perceive, experience, and think about their use of social media continues to be a pertinent area of research as social media platforms and their techno-economic aspects develop. Social media platforms continue datafying and utilizing user's interactions and presence for economic profit, while people respond in various ways, for example through accepting reduced privacy or adopting protective strategies (e.g., Fulton & Kibby, 2017; Bocca Artieri et al., 2021).

Asking how social media natives use social media as social and public spaces, this study explores how young people in Norway, accustomed to online spaces as relevant to social life, use contemporary social media platforms. While age is no standalone explanation for media familiarity or savviness, young Norwegians are likely to be accustomed to social media as spaces for socialization and acquiring information, having grown up with the smartphone. The study relies on 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews with people aged between 19 and 29 years old. Thematic analysis is used to analyze interview data qualitatively, with particular attention to main themes across interviews. While 'visible participation' is traced in articles 1 and 3, article 2 detects social media participation beyond what is publicly and visibly available online.

Findings show that the interviewees use social media for upholding social relationships in closed-off online spaces, for learning, understanding, or staying updated on news and current affairs. In public spaces, on the other hand, they rather largely take on roles as audiences. The study demonstrates that although people do not necessarily engage in online public conversation or visible participation forms, they may still engage in participatory practices on social media. The article outlines how interviewees implicitly point to mechanisms such as datafication and virality as grounds for their negotiated participation and circumventive strategies. While taking these mechanisms for granted, the interviewees simultaneously demonstrate a resistance to them. Based on the analysis, I propose the term "digital gemeinschaft 2.0", as a continuation of Ling's "digital gemeinschaft" (2012) playing on

Tönnies' (1887/2001) dichotomy of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. The term is used to (1) emphasize that social media platforms provide participatory spaces, thus adding more than transmission (cf. Ling, 2012), and (2) highlighting that these spaces are shaped by for-profit incentives, and that tensions occur between these logics and people's needs and aims when using social media platforms. The article provides an in-depth inquiry into the feelings, evaluations, and reasons that underlie the interviewees' behaviors and concerns regarding participating on social media.

The findings presented in the article are in this thesis used to illuminate how interviewees are accustomed to social media logics as naturalized steering wheels of information and communication on social media, and how 'orientation' may be a participation form particularly invited on social media platforms due to people's active strategies in refusing to entirely adapt to its logics. Findings thus illustrate that the repertoire of 'participation' should include more than public partaking.

The third article is titled "*Hyperconnected publics: Algorithmic support of counter-publics on TikTok*". It focuses on social media structures as co-creators of communicative spaces, delving into the trajectories between online environments and counter-public formations. Asking whether TikTok's personalization algorithms support the construction of counter-publics, and if so, how such publics may materialize in its personalized content feed, the article relies on an

exploratory digital ethnography to deep-dive into TikTok's personalization mechanisms as traced on its algorithmically curated content feed. Over a course of four months, from April – July 2022, I used three different TikTok accounts, on three different smartphones, while using a field diary to document the process and developments.

Findings show that TikTok supports the formation of counter-publics, both in the case of marginalized individuals aiming for democratic enhancement and for individuals with anti-democratic aims. The article focuses on content from the latter, explicating the gender essentialist continuum creators and videos can be seen as placing themselves along, as they must be understood in relation to a larger, increasingly prominent, anti-gender movement. It thus relies on an operationalization of 'anti-democratic counter-publics', to capture anti-democratic self-proclaimed oppressed groups which aim to uphold or introduce exclusion and oppression. This article contributes evidence that while concepts relying on technological determinant understandings such as filter bubbles are increasingly considered debunked, TikTok's strong personalization supports 'hyperconnectedness'[3], enabling users to enter a loop of radical and extremist content inside of their TikTok universe. While demonstrating the valuable functions TikTok and its

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[3] In Article 3, I call both the actors operating on a gender essentialist continuum and the LGBTQ+ counter conversations for *hyperconnected publics.* This term explains how counter-publics formations are supported on TikTok, while being open to 'outsiders' due to TikTok's "viralization" (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020) and visibility mechanisms.

social media logics may provide to (democratic) counter-publics, the article also demonstrates how anti-democratic and extremist rhetoric proliferate in digital publics, taking advantage of and being enabled by social media. This further shows how radical and extremist content may easily blend and join less radical and extremist content.

In this thesis, I evaluate these findings through the lens of the sensitizing concept of resistance, and discuss how they inform the question of how social media logics influence participation. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, people may utilize social media logics when seeking attention, and certain kinds of communications – which may be particularly used by certain actors – may particularly suit and be rewarded by social media logics. This in other words illuminates how 'resistance' as participation form can be understood through the lens of counter-public formations, and how social media logics may be particularly beneficial to certain forms of resistance.

1.5   The Norwegian context

This study focuses on the Norwegian context, which is reflected in several aspects of this thesis, and which shape what knowledge it generates, and hence, its contribution. As one of the Nordic welfare states, Norway is considered a safe and high ranking, stable democracy (Boese et al., 2022; Sejersted, 2011; Global Peace Index, 2021), known for its affluence, stability, high voter turnout and (lateral and vertical)

trust (Midtbøen et al., 2017). Similar to the other Nordic countries, its media system is shaped by a proactive state "operating at an arm's length distance" (Moe et al., 2023, p. 29), well-established legacy media, including a state-funded and a hybrid public broadcaster subjected to public service obligations. Professionalized and editorial media receive direct and indirect financial support in the form of direct press support and VAT exemption (e.g., Media Support Act 2020; Sjøvaag & Krumsvik, 2017) and is protected by regulation aimed at normative goals, such as securing an independent, diverse, equally accessible, and informative media landscape (e.g., Broadcasting Act 2022). This reflects the Norwegian state's *facilitating approach* to reach democratic goals through the media (as different from a negative freedom - "hands-off" - approach) (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). The proactiveness in media policy follows the state's obligations, part of the constitution (Article 100), to secure conditions that can facilitate open and well-informed public conversations (NOU 2017: 7). Norwegian citizens have high levels of trust to prominent media organizations, especially the publicly funded public service broadcaster NRK (Moe & Bjørgan, 2023).

According to a report from the Norwegian commission of freedom of speech in 1999, communication has come to be considered "*the* central constituting element of society" (NOU 1999: 27, p. 88, my translation). Communication is seen as a tool to reach diversity and tolerance (NOU 2022: 9), reflected in national education objectives (e.g., Meld. St. 28 ((2015-2016)) and media policy (NOU 2017: 7). The state in other words has a responsibility to secure freedom of expression

through supporting and developing public spaces where such practices can and should occur (Kalleberg, 2016; NOU 1999: 27, pp. 249-250). The media are thus seen crucial to sustain participation forms that are fruitful to democratic culture and processes, through creating public connection, active partaking in public discussions, and a shared identity or sense of community. Social media platforms, however, are not built for these purposes. Although they claim participation as a value (e.g., Couldry & van Dijck, 2015), they are not oriented to the fulfilment of participatory ideals as reflected in Norwegian media policy objectives and further reflected in the democratic deliberative tradition (Kalleberg, 2016). Norwegians' use of social media has however proliferated (Aalen & Iversen, 2021; Newman et al., 2022; Moe et al., 2023). As one of the world's most digital countries (Newman et al., 2022), where a large part of the population has the technological facilities required for taking part online (Digital Economy and Society Index 2021), Norway has experienced a rapid change in its media environment and political communication with the rise of digital media that enables "dodging the gatekeepers" (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013, p. 737), and new practices of production and consumption of media content (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). These changes have thus also enabled new and easier ways to connect to one's co-citizens. Looking at what happens outside of the well-established, regulated, editorial and professionalized media, towards how participation unfolds in highly unregulated and algorithmically curated spaces is thus crucial given these spaces' prominent position to how public information and communication is

used, produced, and transmitted. Unlike traditional media, they provide participatory spaces, however, without being regulated or aimed towards the participatory ideals as reflected in Norwegian media policy.

1.6   *Social media platforms as defined in this thesis*

The main objective of this thesis is thus to scrutinize participation in and through emergent arenas that have become increasingly relevant to the circulation of opinions, perspectives, and experiences in the Norwegian public. These arenas are identified as social media platforms. When employing the term 'social media' in this thesis, I mean "a variety of internet-based tools that users engage with by maintaining an individual profile and interacting with others based on a network of connections" (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 152). The terms "social media" and "social media platforms" are thus meant to capture image-based messaging tools such as Snapchat, as well as other network services such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter[4], and Facebook, including the direct messaging functions some of these provide (such as Facebook's Messenger, or the direct messaging function on Instagram popularly termed "the dm") (Moe et al., 2019). This conceptualization excludes sites such as Google

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[4] Twitter was renamed X in 2023, following Elon Musk's purchase of the platform (Ivanova, 2023).

which does not have individual networks of social connections and interaction as main operating function and imperative.

When I started my work on this doctoral thesis in early 2019, I considered Instagram as a suited platform for investigating participation and interaction on emerging platforms. Together with its counterparts Twitter and Facebook, it namely ranked as one of the most used platforms in Norway while being less examined by research. During the past four years, however, the social media platform TikTok has expeditiously developed into a prominent platform in the social media landscape (Ipsos, 2023). It particularly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fishwick, 2020; Schellewald, 2023). Being visually oriented and developed for the smartphone (not first appearing on desktop computers or being verbally oriented), it shares similar traits as Instagram. It emerges, as Instagram once did, as an understudied platform which can give novel insight into future developments and role of social media platforms and its logics, and its challenges or possibilities to people's participation. Instagram and TikTok are in other words both typical instances of how new digital arenas continue to facilitate forms of civic participation, connection, for interpersonal communication, and information gathering and distribution. While the first article draws content from Instagram (and the second article employed Instagram content in interviews), the third article tackles TikTok.

1.7 Thesis outline

The following chapters outline the main tools used to evaluate how the studies inform how social media logics influence participation on social media platforms. In Chapter 2, I outline relevant previous research and how this thesis position itself to different strands of research. Here, particularly relevant topics are visible and public interactions (such as public conversations) versus the more 'invisible' and private interactions (conducive to orientation rather than public partaking), the relation between personalization and counter-publics (representing resistance to mainstream stuctures or understandings), and social media logics, its economic backdrop and interface features. Chapter 3 discusses how participation is understood and employed as theoretical concept. Here, public sphere theory works as an overarching critical framework to scrutinize the media as distributor and arena, and through which different kinds of participation is positioned and understood, particularly through the sensitizing concepts conversation, orientation, and resistance. In Chapter 3 I also present social media logics, as relevant to social media participation, contextualizing the three articles. Following this theoretical discussion, Chapter 4 outlines the research design of this thesis. I discuss how scrutinizing participation force sensitive demarcations and methods, how the research was conducted, including its epistemology, and describe considerations not addressed in each specific article. Lastly, Chapter 5 outlines this thesis' findings and contribution. After a section listing references, the three articles are

listed. At the time of submission, article 1 and article 2 are published, while article 3 is in review.

2   Literature Review

This thesis places itself within public sphere theory, drawing especially on the deliberative democracy research tradition. Specifically, it positions itself in the research areas that consider people's use of, and expressions in, social media platforms as communicative spaces. At the same time, employing a social constructivist perspective, it mobilizes criticisms of the deliberative research tradition. To that end, the thesis finds itself in the field of media sociology while reflecting the inter- and multidisciplinary nature of media studies as an academic field.

Media sociology considers the relationship between media and society, dealing with how the media can be understood through considering society and social life, and conversely, how society and social life can be understood through considering the media. A range of areas and topics find their place under the umbrella of media sociology (Waisbord, 2016), including media institutions, history and developments, producers, content, audiences, and users. When approaching these areas and topics, media sociology poses questions such as how the media impact and is impacted by structures, power, how they function vis a vis communities (e.g., Reese & Schoemaker, 2016), and how people perceive, utilize, or negotiate the media, including its functions and messages. The field of media sociology thus ranges across levels (e.g., Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) from studies considering macro level (for instance found in the mediatization literature (e.g., Hjarvard, 2008)), to meso level (for example found in research classifying specific

behaviors on social media (e.g., Skoric et al., 2016)), to micro level (found, for instance, in research considering how individuals experience and use social media (e.g., Meribe et al., 2023)). A media sociological lens thus often invites looking to the social dimensions of the media, that is, the social elements that shape and are shaped by the media. At a micro level, dimensions such as gender, class, and profession matter to how people may perceive media content, and how they may use social media platforms (Stevens et al., 2016; Haynes & Wang, 2019). At all levels, a range of social dimensions apply at 'both ends', that is, both in the way the media are impacted and created, and in how they matter to individuals and societies.

Social media platforms – their features and functions – are shaped by algorithms that are not value-free, or inevitably and naturally steered towards tasks that support social media logics (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2018), but are shaped by humans and their social contexts (e.g., Flanagin et al., 2010; Uluorta & Quill, 2022). People furthermore use and understand such platforms differently. One cannot assume whether the principles inscribed in social media as communicative milieus transfer to social media usage. While social media logics are often scrutinized through the traditional nexus between media logics and attention seeking actors, it is, despite social medias' facilitation of participatory and social spaces, scarcely considered with regards to people's participation. Understanding the interplay between social media logics and people's participation is key to grasp how prominent information and communication arenas in society are

"broadly configured" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 149) and how this configuration matter differently and contextually.

This thesis consists of three different empirical approaches to social media participation, relying on (1) Instagram comment sections, (2) Young Norwegians' elaborations about their social media use, and (3) Personalized content feeds on TikTok. These sets of materials are chosen to enable inquiry into how social media function as arenas where public issues are debated, where people can orient themselves towards and take part in a larger public, and where counter-publics may be supported through algorithmic conditions. These investigations are conducted using three sensitizing concepts: (1) Conversation, (2) Orientation, and (3) Resistance. In the following, this literature review reflects on these three different concepts and their relevant fields. It will identify relevant research gaps and place the thesis' studies within the larger field of social media research. The purpose of this literature review is thus to place the thesis in its disciplinary context, rather than provide an exhaustive portrayal of all relevant research. A broad overview of the field of social media research will be presented first, before I focus on the areas where the studies in this thesis contribute.

2.1   Social media research

Social media platforms' widespread relevance in society has prompted scholarly attention from a range of disciplines (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Kapoor et al., 2018). Social media research ranges from inquiries

into whether the internet and social media platforms are conducive to citizen engagement and democracy (Shirky, 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), their place in relation to interpersonal relationships and social capital (Stoycheff et al., 2017), and what privacy issues emerge from their practices (Baruh et al., 2017; Cain & Imre, 2021). Researchers have investigated the cognitive, psychological, and health aspects of social media usage (e.g., Best et al., 2014; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Keles et al., 2019; Steinsbekk et al., 2023), raising questions about, for instance, what might be the impacts of health (mis)information (Wang et al., 2019; see also Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Scholars have also been keen to understand the role of social media for organizations and institutions of various kinds (e.g., Kapoor et al., 2018), what social media means for marketing (Alalwan et al., 2017), politicians and their campaigning (e.g., Engesser et al., 2016), as well as what might be the potential benefits of social media in times of crises (Veil et al., 2011). The various entrances to or utilizations of social media platforms in research inform the integrated and multifunctional role social media platforms have gained (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). As is reflected in the above overview, researchers have often been interested in the role of social media platforms as tools to reach certain aims, particularly in terms of its consequences and impact on other areas or domains, including how social media provide added scope, dimensions, or changes to sociality and citizenship.

A broad variation in social media research can also be witnessed when merely considering media and communication scholarship (Zhang

& Leung, 2014). Historically, research on social media have sprung out of and extended internet studies (e.g., Puschmann & Pentzold, 2021), illustrating the course from social media as primarily website-based (boyd & Ellison, 2007) towards being tailored to and oftentimes developed for mobile devices, especially the smartphone (Zhang & Leung, 2014). Tracing the use of keywords in communication studies, Puschmann and Pentzold (2021) found that up until 2012, the keyword "internet" was most common in communication scholarship, before being exceeded by the keywords "social media", "Facebook", and "Twitter", especially up until 2015, in line with social media platforms' increased usage and attention. Dealing with the many options of how one can classify social media research in communications scholarship, scholars have developed typologies (e.g., boyd & Ellision, 2007; Zhang & Leung, 2014). boyd and Ellison's literature review of scholarship preceding 2007, suggested four broad themes – "impression management and friendship performance", "network and network structure", "bridging online and offline networks", and "privacy" – which were supported and expanded by Zhang and Leung's (2014) literature review of social media research from 2006 to 2011. These studies illustrate how social relationships and connectivity, friendships and socializing, as well as psychological traits and effects, have been particularly noticeable in the early days of internet and social media research (Zhang & Leung, 2014). Puschmann and Pentzold (2021) suggest that since 2015, keywords such as "platforms" and "algorithms" have gained communication scholars' attention (cf. Sandvig et al., 2016;

see also van Dijck et al., 2018), illustrating a turn towards greater focus on the technological conditions of social media platforms.

The word 'algorithm' is synonymous to recipe or procedure. We can think about algorithms on social media platforms as a set of instructions made to conduct certain tasks, often multiple ones at once, put into the 'invisible back-end' of social media platforms for automation (see Striphas, 2015; Gillespie, 2016; see also Sandvig et al., 2016 for a more comprehensive discussion about the definition of algorithm in computer science). The tasks these recipes are set to perform range from making decisions about what content (Gillespie, 2018) or advertising (Sinclair, 2016; Qin & Jiang, 2019) social media users are faced with, and from tailoring "personal and professional networks" to deciphering relevant romantic partners (Sandvig et al., 2016, p. 4973). Algorithms are thus *written* for certain purposes. To that end, they may also illustrate certain emphases and values. Social media logics represent one avenue through which algorithms reflect emphases and values. I will come back to social media logics later in this literature review. As we "increasingly delegate authority to algorithms" (Sandvig et al., 2016, p. 4972), scholars suggest they have "world-making capacities" (Bucher, 2018, np). They influence what matters of the world we are confronted with and thus how the world is presented to us online, and themselves become objects that we understand in certain ways (Gillespie, 2016; Bucher, 2017).

Social media researchers have pointed to such structural dimensions, for instance, how social media platforms impact the media

environment at large (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; 2022), such as traditional news media and classical editorial gatekeeping (Singer, 2014; Swart et al., 2018). This extends scholarship inquiring into how internet sites and services have been embraced and appropriated by traditional mass media (Boczkowski, 2006; Chadha & Wells, 2016; Hassid & Repnikova, 2016), and, increasingly, how institutions' practices, but also social life, take place on and are influenced by social media (Hermida, 2012; see also Braun, 2015; Couldry & van Dijck, 2015). Terms such as the "platform society" (Van Dijck et al., 2018) reflect the place of social media platforms in a larger platform economy that influence social and economic movements, as prominent intermediaries and datafication actors.

How people use the media and what consequences their usage has is at the same time a topic under continuous scrutiny (e.g., Montag et al., 2021). The vast and integrated role of social media platforms in many societies are reflected in the various reasons why, and ways in which, different people use social media (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017; Horvát & Hargittai, 2021; González-González et al., 2022). People's reception and use of the media represents a longstanding area of media research, from early influence of behavioral psychology's stimulus-response paradigms (Blumer, 1933; Cantril, 1940; Merton, 1946)[5], towards focus to people's active and diverse usage (Katz, 1959; Blumler & McQuail, 1968; Hall, 1973; Fiske, 1987). The latter strand of research

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[5] although the extent and existence of an endorsement by early communication scholars is questioned (see, for example, Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985)

emerged as response to previous 'audience research' which relied on notions of people as passive audiences to mass media messages (Scannell, 2007). It suggested that contrary to such beliefs, people were active and negotiating when using the media (e.g., Hall, 1973; Morley, 1980) and used media to fulfill needs and expected gratifications of doing so (Herzog, 1941; Katz et al., 1974; McQuail, 1987). Moving from media users being audiences to "prosumers" (e.g., Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) or "prod-users" (Bruns, 2008; Bruns & Schmidt, 2011), that is, both consumers and producers of media content, research on people's use of social media platforms has furthered the tradition of research on people's media use.

Research has shown that an individual's specific life situation (Kruse et al., 2017; Matassi et al., 2019; Parviz & Piercy, 2021), and characteristics, such as age, gender, educational levels, and internet skills, shape which and how social media platforms are used (e.g., Horvát & Hargittai, 2021). Motivations for using social media can furthermore range from news exposure, learning new information and expressing one's own political views, to entertainment and "relaxed sociability" (González-González et al., 2022; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017; Vitak, 2012; Swart et al., 2018, p. 4342). Despite the range of factors impacting social media usage, social media research has often focused on young generations and their view of and practices on social media. Scholars have suggested that reasons for young people's usage of social media platforms range from self-expression and entertainment to public issue learning and engagement (e.g., Hautea et al., 2021). Social media

platforms have become central to their socialization, and to stay in touch with offline-anchored relationships (McRoberts et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2017).

On the one hand, focusing specifically on young people makes sense as they may utilize social media in their everyday lives more than others (boyd, 2014; Moe & Bjørgan, 2021; 2023), and many are often more adept at new social media platforms and features than older generations (Fang et al., 2019). Terms such as "the "Net Generation" (Tapscott, 1999), "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001a; 2001b), "the Google generation" (Rowlands et al., 2008), "first and second generation digital natives" (Joiner et al., 2013), the "iGeneration" (Rosen, 2010), and "social media natives" (Brandtzæg, 2016), have aimed to describe how people grown up at different stages of digitalization are likely to have a certain digital literacy and understanding, and how they are, in particular ways, accustomed to the newest digital tools as part of their everyday lives. Digitalization in this regard refers to the ways in which "many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures" (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). It thus refers to broad societal transformations stemming from the presence and adoption of digital technologies.

Researchers have, however, also pointed out that generalizing people's abilities and positions from their generational status may

overlook other factors pivotal to an individual's media literacy[6], as well as other factors typically more associated with lives of younger people, consequently leading to an overestimation of the savviness of younger people in dealing with their media environments (Helsper, 2008). Scholars have also contended that uncritically using the term media literacy may overestimate the agency social media users have over their media participation, environment, and their effect. This can fail to promote "critical distance", and lead to too narrow focused inquiries on "content over platform", or overtly stressing individual rather than structural responsibilities (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 14).

The ways in which participation unfolds on social media is a back and forth relationship between people and social media platforms, which will be outlined in this literature review and highlighted throughout this thesis. The broad variation in social media research will be reflected throughout this chapter, as I trace the relevant research from studies focusing on the different ways people use social media for participation, to research emphasizing the ways social media platforms steer, facilitate, and constrain communication. It is the valuable interplay between these two strands of research – representing the participatory and the structural – that is highlighted in this thesis. In the proceeding sections, I outline research on the different ways people participate on social media. I start by introducing research on 'visible' and 'invisible' participation, with

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[6] Media literacy abilities are typically divided in the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create, reflect, and participate (or acting, see Mihailidis (2019) for a critical discussion) through the media (Hobbs, 2011).

particular emphasis on the latter. I then describe research that has focused on the public side, specifically, on public conversations, before presenting insights about personalization mechanisms and online counter-publics. Lastly, I outline research that highlights social media platforms as certain communicative environments. First, I describe the broader economic environment in which social media operates, as a background to understand social media logics, before discussing the role of platform specific features.

2.2   (In)visible participation on social media

So far, I have mentioned how participation on social media is multifaceted. This section elaborates on this. First, I describe research focusing on people who contribute to public discussions, and those who do not, but who engage in participatory practices through observing. Then, I move on to research focusing on people's construction of and participation in closed-off spaces to discuss and share matters, and how elements inherent to social media platforms may invite such practices. The section illuminates how people respond to social media environments in various ways, as well as how social media platforms may be perceived as posing different opportunities and constraints at different points in time.

While scholars have pointed to the internet as a potential training ground for political discussion and participation, especially to people

without much debating experience (Winsvold, 2013), research suggests that Norwegians do not see social media as spaces fit for public conversation. Those who do see social media as spaces suited for public discussion are often already politically active and connected offline (Moe et al., 2019; see also, Winsvold, 2009). A national survey from 2022 suggests that only about 15% of the Norwegian population claim to participate in online discussions about societal issues (SSB, 2022). Similar trends are seen in other Western democratic countries (e.g., Smith, 2009). Research on U.S. Twitter users, for instance, suggests that a minority of users produce a considerable amount of the political content, that this minority share specific characteristics, and that they are more likely to claim that they are politically active offline (Bestvater et al., 2022; see also Pew Research Center, 2020). Bestvater and colleagues' study concluded that: "Americans ages 50 and older make up 24% of the U.S. adult Twitter population but produce nearly 80% of all political tweets" (Bestvater et al., 2022). Research has furthermore suggested that Twitter users are, in general, not representative of a population but disproportionately represent elites (Blank, 2017). These insights illustrate how people's socioeconomic status may play a central role when it comes to who influences and creates content on social media (Dobusch et al., 2017; Fang et al., 2019; Moe et al., 2019; Parviz & Piercy, 2021). Studies furthermore show how contextual circumstances can make certain individuals, especially those that are members of minorities, and women, more prone to be on the receiving end of harassment and hate online (e.g., Sønsteby, 2020; see also Okafor, 2022),

which in turn can make these individual more hesitant to partake in public discussions. Following these insights, we can see how, while social media may cause a rise in political participation, such a rise may first and foremost be relevant to the same people that otherwise already are politically active, the outcome of which could be that political inequalities are rather reproduced, or even aggravated, rather than diminished (Norris, 2001).

Research has, however, suggested that social media may be conducive to political participation for people who are less involved in politics (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), albeit in less visible ways to outsiders. Although the political content encountered online may still largely be produced by people who are already politically engaged (or professional news sites, see for example Kim et al., 2013), research suggest that people who would not otherwise be as interested in or attentive to politics are most likely to gain rising participation levels due to "political experiences" on social media (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Social media may not merely echo or exacerbate participatory gaps, then, but occasionally stimulate political equality (Kim et al., 2013; Xenos et al., 2014; see also, for example, Schlozman et al., 2010). Vaccari and Valeriani (2021) claim that such findings support "a moderately optimistic assessment of the role of social media in Western democracies" as "for the less involved, political experiences on social media are more likely to provide genuinely new avenues for participation" (p. 8). Rather than seeing social media participation through an "one-size-fits-all" approach, then, for example through

framing partaking in public conversations as the only way people participate, one should recognize "the differential participatory effects of social media" (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021, p. 8). These studies suggest that social media participation constitutes various practices, and that their relevance and potential conduciveness to people's connection to the democratic conversation and politics varies. Similarly, and occasionally as response to fears of a passive or disengaged citizenry (Hustinx et al., 2012; Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007), scholars have suggested that participation forms on social media may complement or further traditional political participation types (e.g., Conroy et al., 2012; Ohme et al., 2018) in line with broader participatory shifts in younger generations (Hustinx et al., 2012). For instance, according to Theocharis and colleagues (2022), people's various practices on Facebook and Twitter suggest that there is "more to the modern participatory repertoire" (p. 803; see also Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The need for a broader conceptual repertoire to understand contemporary participation (e.g., Bennett, 2012) has been claimed necessary due to social media platforms' abundance of information and perspectives, enabling "social media listening" (Crawford, 2011) and "active spectating"[7] (Solverson, 2023). In line with research suggesting that distinct practices occur (Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013) or are particularly invited (Bennett &

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[7] Other studies have, on the other hand, moderated the optimistic outlooks about highly interested and politically resourceful "monitorial citizens" (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007).

Segerberg, 2012) on social media platforms, studies have thus demonstrated the value of recognizing participation forms such as observing public discussions and gathering information (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Bergström & Belfrage, 2018).

Research has simultaneously shown that there is more to participation on social media platforms than either partaking publicly or observing others. In their introduction to a special issue entitled "Below the Radar", Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Stefano Brilli, and Elisabetta Zurovac (2021) point to the emergence and increase of social media practices that happens in spaces that are closed off to outsiders, and that researchers therefore cannot as easily access and observe. Terms such as "dark social media" (Swart et al., 2018), "meso-newspace" (Kligler-Vilenchik & Tenenboim, 2020), and "crypto-publics" (Johns, 2020) reflect online practices that are purposefully *not* following the "public by default"-setting of the internet (boyd, 2014, p. 62). They illustrate people closing off communication spaces to outsiders "for the Benefit of Openness" (Dobusch et al., 2017). On the one hand, marginalized and stigmatized individuals may create and participate in private groups for protection and/or social support (Yeshua-Katz & Hård af Segerstad, 2020). On the other hand, closed groups may be used for harmful purposes, such as distributing non-consensual content (e.g., Semenzin & Bainotti, 2021). Research have also shown that non-public spaces and their privacy are utilized to discuss and share news (Kalogeropoulos, 2021; Papacharissi, 2010). Amelia Johns (2020) demonstrates that prior to Malaysia's 14th General Election, Malaysian-Chinese young people

used private spaces on WhatsApp to discuss political matters. State actions against political dissent on social media platforms prompted citizens' escape from "public-facing social media (Twitter, Facebook)" (np) to "encrypted chat groups on Whatsapp" (np) and Telegram. Similar tendencies are echoed in democratic societies where no formal repercussions wait for political dissent, such as in Norway (e.g., Moe et al., 2019). Swart and colleagues (2018), for instance, showed that private online groups in the Netherlands proved valuable to interpersonal communication and participants' orientation to public life, encouraging news sharing and discussion. In the authors' words, these spaces were important to their "'public connection', a means for bridging people's private worlds and everything beyond" (Swart et al., 2018, p. 4329).

A closely related strand of research emphasizes the impact that context collapse and perception of audiences have on participation (e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2011; boyd, 2008; 2010; Papacharissi, 2010). Scholars have drawn on Meyrowitz (1985) and Goffman (1959) to describe the social implications of online circumstances, where set borders between what is public and private, and between different audiences, are lacking (see, for example, Papacharissi, 2010). Joshua Meyrowitz' (1985) theorized how electronic media (especially television) disrupt previously set physical socialization places for different stages of life. Erving Goffman (1959), on the other hand, theorized how people engage in different self-performances depending on how they would like to be perceived in front of certain audiences. Drawing on a Goffmanian focus, scholars have investigated whether context collapse discourage people

from posting content online (Vitak, 2012). Hogan (2010) suggested that when people face context collapse online, they may deal with it by merely posting information that would tailor to the whole audience, different from boyd (2014) who found that the teens she encountered from 2007-2010 played along with the "widespread public-by-default" (p. 62) setting of the internet. This was understandable, according to boyd, as it was "impossible and unproductive to account for the full range of plausible interpretations" (boyd, 2014, p. 32) from different audiences. In a similar vein, contrary to Hogan (2010), Vitak (2012) found that the larger and more diverse the network, the more likely American students were to disclose information on social media (cf. Su et al., 2022).

These studies thus seemingly go against claims that a potential collapse of social contexts online (boyd, 2008; 2014), likely prompts self-censorship (Hogan, 2010; see also Su et al., 2022). However, in Vitak's study, "as the size and diversity of users' network increased, they were more likely to use Friend List" (Vitak, 2012, p. 466). At the time of Vitak's study, Friends List was a privacy feature provided by Facebook that enabled a user to orient a post only to a selected segment of their overall "friends". Vitak (2012) concluded that using this feature helped mitigate "the problems of large networks of disparate audiences", and that similar features recently implemented by the writing of his article perhaps would increase the use of such features. After Vitak and boyd's studies, such social media private messaging tools, allowing the creation of larger group chats, has grown considerably. Snapchat –

typical for interpersonal communication – has gained traction (Vaynerchuk, 2016; Routley & Adeli, 2021), Instagram's direct messaging function enabling private communication was introduced in 2013 (Setalva, 2015), and Facebook's direct messaging functions Messenger, Whatsapp, and the messaging and calling app Wechat has become three of the seven most used social media platforms globally (Kemp, 2022). Conducting their study at a time when a range of possibilities to choosing audience and such closed off private spaces had emerged, Velasquez and Rojas (2017) suggested that handling the collapse of social contexts likely necessitates high competencies on the user, as they must navigate through different direct messaging features and content evaluations when managing and tailoring messages to potential audiences.

These studies together thus suggest that different features and designs of social media platforms matter, which will further be addressed in the last section of this chapter. The research outlined so far also highlights how different people's perceptions about social media, their possibilities, and constraints, may vary accordingly, in connection with people's backgrounds and motivations. How possibilities and constraints are connected to the relationship between social media circumstances and people's perceptions is illustrated in studies investigating how surveillance imaginaries and knowledge impact people's participation. Research that deals with social media surveillance namely also have ties to these strands of research concerning participation forms that may easily go "below the radar" of researchers only looking at publicly

available interaction traces (Boccia Artieri et al., 2021). Attempting to "hide" or disguise (parts of) oneself online has namely been seen as protective strategies connected to the surveillance (Trottier, 2012; Kruse et al., 2017; Odermatt et al., 2023), or "dataveillance" (van Dijck, 2014) on social media. Discussions around and research concerning the effects of online surveillance on online participation has concerned its "chilling effects" (Schauer, 1978), or inhibition effects (Ahmed & Lee, 2023), that is, the ways in which it makes people refrain from doing certain things online (e.g., Büchi et al., 2020). A growing body of literature emphasize the effects that "algorithmic imaginary" (Bucher, 2017) or algorithmic literacy (Silva et al., 2022) have on people's use and understanding of current prominent social media (Bucher, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2019; Hargittai et al., 2020; Swart, 2021). Algorithmic imaginary, can in Bucher's words explain "ways of thinking about what algorithms are, what they should be, how they function and what these imaginations in turn make possible" (2017, p. 40). In other words, algorithms (e.g., Sandvig et al., 2016; see also, Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019; Obermeyer et al., 2019) may matter to how people perceive and experience social media. Research has simultaneously suggested that while some people worry about their personal information's privacy and security online, they continue to use social media platforms, taking a lack of privacy for granted (Fulton & Kibby, 2017). The benefits of social media practices and usage may trump perceived risks, especially when the latter is not directly experienced (Debatin et al., 2009). As is illustrated later in this literature review, and further in Chapter 3,

surveillance or "dataveillance" (van Dijck, 2014) is closely related to the business models of social media corporations.

This section has discussed how people respond to social media environments in various ways, shaped by their life situation and (experienced and perceived) possiblities and constraints of social media platforms. It has also demonstrated that a lot of participation goes on beyond what is visible on social media platforms. These studies suggest that to understand the reason, meaning, and purpose of social media practices, research needs to move beyond the study of visible traces of interactions. This insight underlies the motivation for Article 2, as it interviews people about how they perceive and use social media. In Chapter 5, I show how this article enables identifying a form of participation that is unidentifiable through studies such as those conducted in Study 1 and 3. It also enables scrutinizing how social media logics are experienced and perceived outside of the realm of attention-seeking actors. Section 2.5.1 describe the gap this represents in social media logics literature. Study 2 thus brings this thesis' analysis further as it enables the connection of invisible participation forms to social media logics. The next section outlines research considering a part of *the visible* side; how people contribute to public conversations on social media.

2.3   Public conversations on social media

The late 1990s to the early 2000s came to mark the beginning of scholarly interest in online written communication, from online games to chat rooms and forums (Chadwick, 2009; Meredith, 2019). Since then, research has oftentimes focused on the deliberative quality of online conversations (Papacharissi, 2002; Chadwick, 2006; Dahlberg, 2007)[8], stemming from Habermas' (1981/1984; 1992/1996) deliberation ideals, measuring factors such as reciprocity and respect (Esau, 2022). Although scholars have held and employed different notions and operationalizations regarding how communication should be conducted in the deliberation process (Friess & Eilders, 2015; Manosevitch, 2010), Stranderg and Grönlund (2018) suggests that there has been a relatively strong agreement among scholars that conversations should be "inclusive, rational-critical, reciprocal, and respectful" (p. 366). Although deliberative traits have been found in digital discussions prompted by public initiatives (Albrecht, 2006) and democracy projects (Dahlberg, 2001b), and occasionally in online forums outside of such initiatives (Graham, 2009; Gonzalez-Bailon et al., 2010), studies have largely shown that online discussions contradict or fail to fully add up to the full extent of Habermasian deliberative democratic ideals (Jankowski & van Os, 2004; Esau et al., 2020; Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2020; Jakob et al., 2021). When discussing matters, people have for example

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[8] The broader resurgence of the participatory democratic tradition in the 1960s and -70s is also an explanatory factor in this regard (see e.g., Chadwick, 2009, p. 13).

not been reciprocal and failed to give argumentation when making claims, ideals inherent to the deliberative tradition of how to conduct a democratically fruitful debate (see e.g., Hagemann, 2002; Strandberg, 2008). Online environments have also come to be a place of aggression, incivility, and hate (e.g., O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Quandt, 2018), thus not fostering deliberative ideals of mutual respect or understanding across differences (Dahlberg 2001b).

How to design online spaces that are conducive to political debate has consequently been a topic of scholarly debate within online communication research (see, for example, Črnič & Prodnik, 2015; Berg, 2016). Dahlberg (2001b) contends that initiatives to prompt online deliberation may be promising isolated instances of democratically valuable digital communication, but that they are too minimal and scarce compared to larger "commercial sites". Similarly, Rossini and Stromer-Galley (2020) contend that the design and infrastructures of social media platforms could, if advanced, be conducive to a higher quality in online conversations, but that social media realistically presenting as societal discussion arenas are owned by corporations not interested in such transformation. The latters' design and infrastructures are developed for economic profit, rather than for democratic participatory outcomes (van Dijck et al., 2018). The introduction about platform economy and social media logics in this literature review, as well as Chapter 3, will describe this further.

Another response to the empirical findings of scarce deliberative quality on the internet has pertained to moving beyond or open up strict notions of deliberative demands when assessing (online) conversations (see e.g., Chadwick, 2009; Wright, 2012; Winsvold, 2013) or continue to use them, but as normative yardsticks (Wessler, 2018). Research has illustrated the benefit of recognizing social media as particular places that invite certain kinds of public conversations (e.g., Vatnøy, 2017; Andersen, 2020). Already 15 years ago, Graham (2009) suggested that online forums provided arenas where a mixing of "the private and the public (is) the norm" (Graham, 2009, p. 168). He contended that informal online spaces provided arenas "where participants (take) personal experiences and life lessons and bridge them to society at large, fostering a more personal and lifestyle-based form of politics" (Graham, 2009, p. 168). Studies have extended such insights, recognizing contextual circumstances of social media platforms as well as positioned public discussions and their potential functions beyond the deliberative tradition. Vatnøy (2017) argued that in order to investigate political rhetoric on social media properly, one should include a notion of the epideictic rhetorical genre. Andersen (2020) similarly showed that Facebook discussions were shaped by an "epideictic struggle", and an expression form of "moral stance taking" that likely hinders deliberation.

Despite the range of research investigating online conversations, there are still gaps as to whether insights can be transferred to new social media platforms, and, not least, how we can understand conversations on social media as specific kinds of public communications in light of their

contextual circumstances of the social media platform itself. In Rossini and Stromer-Galley's (2020) words: "More work is needed to understand the implications and the design choices in corporate spaces that shape the quality and character of informal talk" (p. 703). As will be shown in the next section, Instagram represents one social media platform where scholarship has not been as eager to investigate public conversations as on, for example, Twitter and Facebook.

2.3.1 Public conversations on Instagram

Despite a growing body of research on Instagram, from 2015 onwards and especially proliferating from 2020 (Rejeb et al., 2022), research about its comment sections has remained quite marginal. The lack of studies investigating comment sections on Instagram arguably represent one way scholarly inquiry into Instagram remains inconsistent with its prominence (Caliandro & Graham, 2020; Ferreira et al., 2021). Rather, in line with Instragram's visual nature (Gibbs et al., 2015), research that have investigated public expressions and the political functions of Instagram have, for instance, used Instagram images as data (e.g., Seltzer et al., 2017). Studies have also focused on motivations for using the platform, types of users and their different practices, and mental health outcomes (Lee et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2018; Faelens, et al., 2021; Greene et al., 2022; Maclean et al., 2022; Unruh-Dawes et al., 2022), as well as marketing, health care and the COVID-19 pandemic (Rejeb et al., 2022). Scholars have inquired into the ability Instagram provides for self-

presentation (Gray et al., 2018; Bast, 2021; Dou, 2021; Kreling et al., 2022; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022) - with political purposes (Caldeira et al., 2020) - and for representation (Philips et al., 2022; Rosa & Soto-Vásquez, 2022). Studies within these realms have suggested that the social media platform has been used as a tool to challenge stereotypes and hegemonic representations and understandings (Mahoney, 2020; Childs, 2022; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Philips et al., 2022).

Despite the common perception of Instagram as a platform mainly used for self-curation (Marom, 2017) occasionally leading to career opportunities (Márquez et al., 2022) or utilized deliberately to achieve or uphold microcelebrity or "influencer" status (Mavroudis, 2020), the platform has thus also been used for political purposes (e.g., Towner & Muñoz, 2020; Peng, 2020; Caldeira et al., 2020; Al-Rawi, 2021; Larsson, 2021). Studies have investigated how politicians and political parties are using the platform (Filimonov et al., 2016; Abidin, 2017; Larsson, 2017; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; O'Connell, 2018; Pineda et al., 2020; Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2020), and how people engage with politicians on the platform (Parmalelee & Roman, 2019; Peng, 2020; Farkas & Bene, 2020). Instagram is not, however, merely used for the conveying of political messages by politicians or parties. A growing body of research reflects how Instagram provides spaces where people can create, share, learn, and negotiate politically relevant matters (Geboers, 2019; Baishya, 2021; Butkowski, 2022) which may contribute to online activism (Li, 2022) and participation in offline political protests (Scherman & Rivera, 2021; Barbala, 2022).

The scarce research considering comment sections, however, may perhaps be due to Instagram's status as a visual orientation outlier in its early days, or its reputation as a place for self-curation and as an 'influencer-machine' (e.g., Frier, 2020). While studies have used comment sections as data (see e.g., Andalibi et al., 2017; Briliani et al., 2019; Li, 2021), Instagram has not been investigated as a space for public conversations with the same eagerness as other social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and forums (see e.g., Andersen, 2020; Jackson et al., 2018; Vatnøy, 2017; Moore et al., 2009). Exceptions to this trend include quantitative studies employing large data sets to investigate patterns and technical aspects of Instagram comments (such as length, frequency of emoticons, hashtags and tagging (@)) (Ferreira et al., 2021; Trevisan et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2022), and qualitative studies focusing on specific communication cultures (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021; Khanna & Katarina, 2022) or discussions on human rights matters (Ukonu et al., 2021). Kang and colleagues (2022) contributes with a macro view on the Instagram comment section universe, revealing that as much as 54,8% of 4 million comments analyzed included user tagging, and suggested that this practice is often used for the purpose of interpersonal communication. Their proposed model of what motivates users furthermore showed that while 44,08% and 47,74% of comments were information and relationship oriented, respectively, only 8,18% of the comments were oriented towards discussion. In a similar vein, Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2021) found that youths were engaged in political conversations less on Instagram than on Youtube and TikTok, and that

discussion among politically differently positioned youths occurred rarely on Youtube and TikTok, but was completely absent on Instagram. According to the authors, these findings may be explained by different social norms (see also Gibbs et al., 2015), and Instagram's particular affordances, as Instagram is "usually perceived as a platform geared toward sharing visual content around lifestyle topics" (p. 7), hence exerting "a depoliticizing influence" (p. 11). Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2012) did however simultaneously note that this was perhaps changing in a "post-Black Lives Matter era" (p. 7). The Black Lives Matter protests, particularly sparked after the murder of George Floyd (Stewart & Ghaffary, 2020), were met by trends such as posting black squares on Instagram for support, followed by hashtags such as #blackouttuesday[9] (see also Khanna & Katarina, 2022). The potential of Instagram to spark political discussions or reflections is furthermore reflected in a growing body of research considering the role of "influencers" in politics (e.g., Wiken, 2020; Suuronen et al., 2021; Arthur, 2022; Wellman, 2022).

These studies may illustrate that Instagram is less perveived as a place for public discussion than other social media by both users and researchers. They simultaneously, however, highlight that we do not know much about how conversations play out on Instagram when they do. While the online communication literature on other social media, as

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[9] Also sparking debates about "slacktivism" – criticisms of online practices of support failing to contribute to real life consequences, but creating a feeling of satisfying action, and, hence substituting and veiling the need for real life action (see e.g., Diaz et al., 2022; Ho, 2020).

outlined in the previous section, provide fruitful insights, they are not directly transferrable to Instagram. How people discuss public matters on Instagram matters to how we can understand the entanglement between people's participation and visually prominent social media platforms and their logics (see 2.5.1). Instagram is not just natively more visual, it has incorporated new features to reap the benefits of the success-recipes of other popular social media platforms (such as Snapchat, through introducing 'Instagram Stories' and TikTok, through its 'Instagram Reels') (Kantrowitz, 2020; Zibreg, 2022).

Article 1 addresses this gap, analyzing comment sections under posts that address public issues. It fills the gap of scarce Instagram comment section research, and gives further insight into how social media platforms provide communicative spaces. Chapter 5, further, shows how the findings derived from this study informs how social media logics may influence participation as people interact publicly in certain communicative circumstances that are shaped by and support these logics. Although research has connected online conversations to the economic incentives of social media platforms, studies have not placed such findings vis a vis social media logics theory. As the next section illustrates, social media's personalization and information distribution represent central elements of how social media enable spaces for communication. This will further illuminate the interplay between social media platforms' logics and people's participation, a topic following the next section.

2.4 Personalization and Counter-publics

Personalization has functioned as a tool to deal with information abundance for both audiences[10] and producers, as new media (including newspapers, radio, television, and the internet) have been introduced (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018). In the media literature, personalization can be defined as the "targeting of specific audiences" (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018, p. 876). Before social media, commercial objectives and personalization were perhaps most clearly connected through mass media's connection of audiences to advertisers. A definition tailored to today's media environment is provided by Thurman and Schifferes (2012), which understand personalization as:

> A form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery, and arrangement of a communication to individual users' explicitly registered and/or implicitly determined preferences. (p. 776)

Personalization is inherent to social media's business models (Van Alstyne et al., 2016; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The recommendation of content and tailoring of people's social media content feeds have been topics of scholarly inquiry (e.g., Bozdag, 2013) attending to, for instance, its effects on news exposure (Bakshy et al., 2015) and its ethical

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[10] See, for example, Schmitt and colleagues (2018) for an example of online information overload experiences.

challenges (Milano et al., 2020). While some scholars have argued that social media personalization mechanisms prompt different media diets and leads to fragmentation, in turn threatening a universality principle and democratic ideals (Sunstein, 2001; Pariser, 2011), others have discussed whether these developments bring new opportunities which enable targeting audiences with specific content in ways that rather complement a new definition of universality based on personalization (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018).

In the field of public sphere theory, the media are recognized as tools relevant to the fulfilment of an egalitarian access-principle beyond formal terms (Fraser, 2010). This includes accurate and fair representations of, but also performing and facilitating "democratic listening" to (Wessler, 2018, p. 159), diverse people and marginalized communities. Institutional media, such as television and newspapers, have been crucial in their functions as gatekeepers and framers of reality (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Hall, 1992), affecting minorities' representation and their perspectives and voices' entrance to the 'general' public conversation. With social media platforms, people may find such representations and information outside of traditional broadcasters, shared by other individuals and groups. Marginalized communities may find valuable tools and spaces to connect, and to share experiences and acquire support. Social media platforms' personalization has been discussed and researched both with regards to its potential facilitation and its potential prevention of such goals. On the one hand, social media has facilitated valuable spaces and connections

to marginalized communities (e.g., Labor, 2022). Counter-public theories (see Chapter 3) have been employed to study how minority groups utilize platforms for support and community, the creation of shared understandings and languages, and in turn, to strengthen their voices in the general public (e.g., Squires, 2002; Jackson & Welles, 2016; Jackson et al., 2018). On the other hand, research has also demonstrated how social media platforms facilitate radicalization (e.g., Weimann & Masri, 2023). Scholarly worries and inquiries into whether social media facilitate "echo chambers" (Sunstein, 2001; 2017) or "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011) have similarly persisted (Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015; Bruns, 2019a).

Some of the research that challenges the determinism of "echo chamber" and "filter bubble" narratives (cf. Messing & Westwood, 2014; Bruns, 2019a) emphasize that platforms such as Facebook facilitate network ties that may prompt heterogeneity in the political and ideological content that users are exposed to, and that users' actions matter more than algorithmic steering (Bakshy et al., 2015; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). Other studies have highlighted or criticized researchers' too narrow and simplified within-platform perspectives when discussing potential fragmentation (e.g., Flaxman et al., 2016; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). While research has disproven and challenged the notion of empirical presence of these terms in deterministic and oversimplified versions (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), and proved that people may stumble upon new sources of information (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017), concerns remain as to whether social media, to some

individuals, may *contribute* to polarization (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021; Su et al., 2022), leading certain smaller parts of the citizenry (Dubois & Blank, 2018) into radical media environments. Distribution mechanisms may thus especially matter to questions concerning social media's role to counter-publics (e.g., Dicenzo et al., 2011). This may particularly pertain to social media platforms that do not (mainly) rely on social connections through who users have actively followed, and that does not inevitably or singlehandedly steer people, their world views and opinions, but where a strong personalization logic prevails which actively utilize implicit indications of preference to tailor users to content. This description particularly suits TikTok.

While personalization sustains all prominent social media (van Dijck, 2014), TikTok has been given particular public attention for its personalization mechanisms (Abidin, 2021). TikTok relies on recommendation and ranking algorithms to customize individuals' experiences on the platform according to their presumed preferences and interests, as they are indicated to (i.e., interpreted by) the platform (either by likes, following, spent time watching certain content, and scrolling past other content (e.g., Fannin, 2019; Schellewald, 2021; Weimann & Masri, 2023)). The social media platform officially aims to "inspire creativity and bring joy" (TikTok.com, 2024). This aim is in line with TikTok profit-incentives, relying on a rationale that people spend more time on the platform if they are presented with content that is highly relevant to them (see also Chen et al., 2021). TikTok's steering of users' experiences on the platform according to an "algorithmic closeness"-

rationale (Krutrök, 2021, p. 1), where social connections are engendered through the social media platform's recommendation systems analytics rather than mainly through users who have actively 'followed' or befriended others, have facilitated valuable spaces and connections to marginalized communities (Avdeeff, 2021; see also, Simpson & Seeman, 2020; Labor, 2022; Simpson et al., 2022), as well as radical groups and individuals such as extreme far-right activists and groups (Weimann & Masri, 2023; see also Cook, 2019; Cox, 2018), reflecting far-right communities' successful utilization of the online world, from the internet to social media platforms (Darmstadt et al., 2019).

However, despite the above-mentioned insights, there is still scarce research that directly engages with the social media platform's personalization mechanism. Rather, in line with TikTok being commonly known as a platform for younger users, where singing/dancing duets and trends, often as "memetic remixes" (Zheng & Abidin, 2021), proliferate, alongside humorous and silly content (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Literat, 2021), research has often been inclined towards the usage of, and/or the platform's impact on, pre- or early adolescents, teens, and young adults (e.g., Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Kennedy, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Schellewald, 2023). Accordingly, much research considers the role of TikTok to teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Literat, 2021; Hartung et al., 2022; see also, Wright, 2021), or as a general learning tool (cf. Hayes et al., 2020; Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2021; Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). Many studies are, furthermore, concerned with

how public health agencies used TikTok to spread information about, or how users used the platforms to discuss, the COVID-19 pandemic (Basch et al., 2020; Unni & Weinstein, 2021; Southwick et al., 2021, see also Alonso-López et al., 2021 on the spreading of general disinformation). While TikTok's rise in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fishwick, 2020) could help explain the large amount of research from a health perspective, a medical lens is also reflected in literature scoping beyond the pandemic (e.g., Fowler et al., 2021; Kong et al., 2021; Song et al., 2021; Wang & Scherr, 2021; see also, Comp et al., 2021).

Due to its user demographic and its reputation as a space for creative and playful content, TikTok was for long commonly seen as an 'innocent' platform compared to its far more researched counterparts Twitter and Facebook. However, the platform has engendered controversies regarding its regulation and censorship (Hern, 2019), discrimination (Biddle et al., 2020), and security threat (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023), and as illustrated, has also grown into a place consisting of a myriad of content. Emerging research particularly illuminate this trend, showing, for instance, that TikTok is used to craft political messages and for political engagement (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Divon, 2022), such as climate change discourse and activism (Basch et al., 2022; Hautea et al., 2021).

While not often explicitly dealt with, Tiktok's personalization mechanism is witnessed by researchers exploring when so-called

TikTok-"sides" occasionally intersect, prompting "Please interact - I'm on the wrong side of TikTok!"-videos (see also Abidin, 2020). Such pleads are commonly posted in attempts to make people interact with one's video to indicate to TikTok's algorithms which audience to distribute their future posts to. They can be seen as calls for (ideal) distribution and usage, as pleads for *virality between likeminded others*, located by scholars as inherent to social media logics (Klinger & Svensson, 2016; 2018). Similarly, in the "you have now entered"-trend, people "welcome each other into what they believe to be a specific and obscure 'rabbit hole' on TikTok that is otherwise difficult to discover" (Abidin, 2020, p. 88). These algorithmic imaginaries (Bucher, 2017) and practices do not just reflect experiences of and engagements with personalization (see Schellewald, 2023) and social media logics. Although deterministic notions of fragmented publics are not useful, they prompt questions as to the role of highly algorithmically curated content feeds, especially to mediated counter-public formations, and further, to the public sphere.

While personalization has become a 'natural' feature of platforms (van Dijck, 2014), the choices made by the creator of TikTok, Zhang Yiming, facilitating unprecedented algorithmic personalization mechanisms, is considered reflecting China's aspirations to utilize AI "in the race for global tech dominance" (Fannin, 2019, np.). The ways in which TikTok tailor content to its users has been scarcely examined, likely due to its mechanisms being hidden in a "well-guarded black box" (Abidin, 2021, p. 85; see also Alexander, 2020). This has made it

difficult for scholars to scrutinize the social media platform beyond users' content creation. In fact, when scholars do address the personalization of TikTok, they have attempted to avoid its effects to their own data collection processes (e.g., Schellewald, 2021). Article 3 addresses the gap of scarce research on TikTok's personalized content feed, and adds a contribution to digital ethnographic studies (e.g., Abidin, 2020; Schellewald, 2021) as a suggested remedy to investigate the inaccessible personalization mechanisms of platforms. Rather than attempting to avoid personalization effects when scrutinizing TikTok through digital ethnography, it embraces them (see also Zulli & Zulli, 2020). As described above, profit-incentives underlie the personalization mechanisms of Tiktok's content feed, created to draw people to the platform and to make them spend time there. Social media personalization thus represents how people's presence and activities on social media platforms are commodities in the platform economy. The following section briefly introduces the larger platform economy where social media are situated, before scholarly interest in social media logics is outlined.

2.5 Social media as platforms and communicative environments

Before diving into the social media logics literature, of which theoretical aspects are further outlined in Chapter 3, we should briefly consider its larger backdrop. Social media platforms namely share a place next to

other types of platforms under the platform economy umbrella. As such, research often captured by the term 'platform studies' have commonly discussed the business models of platforms (see e.g., Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck et al., 2018; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; 2022). These studies illustrate a larger discussion, across disciplines, about the ways in which prominent platforms – as understood beyond social media as defined in this thesis, including services by Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft (GAFAM) – affect organizations, productions, and people's practices and social life, due to their reliance on these platforms (Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck, 2013; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). In this sense, a platform can be understood as "a business based on enabling value-creating interactions between external producers and consumers", which "provides an open participative infrastructure for these interactions and sets governance conditions for them" (Parker et al., 2016). This definition highlights that today's platform economy engenders multisided market structures, connecting many actors and interests at once, enabling shifting and dynamic roles and relationships (Evans, 2003; Evans & Schmalensee 2016; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2016). Recognizing the commodification of user data, van Dijck and colleagues (2018) provides the following definition of online platforms: "technology geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data" (p. 4).

Despite news media organizations' various resistance against the pervasiveness of the GAFAM platform corporations and the new market structure (Ihlebæk & Sundet, 2021), research has suggested that news

organizations and media publishers have variously adapted, both in terms of production and distribution (Bell & Owen, 2017; Nieborg & Poell, 2018) due to their various dependence (cf. Meese & Hurcombe, 2020) on these platforms as intermediaries connecting them to audiences and advertising (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022; see also Nechushtai, 2018). In fact, content producers across industries have had to adapt their productions, previously relying on a linear process, "into one in which content is contingent, modularized, constantly altered, and optimized for platform monetization" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282).

Discussions have circled around how one can respond to and regulate the ways in which these large dominating players generate and utilize huge amounts of data based on people's presence and practices on platforms (e.g., Andrejevic, 2009; 2013; Sinclair, 2012), proposing revenue and political opportunities also for third-parties (Woolley & Howard, 2019; Meese & Hurcombe, 2020), forced adaption and economic challenges for others (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), while often presenting as neutral actors, simply as 'distributors' or facilitators of spaces (van Dijck, 2013; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). Antitrust regulations aiming to demand and ease data sharing in platform markets are thus proposed by the EU to facilitate fairer competition, defining GAFAM-members as 'gatekeepers' due to their dominant market positions (e.g., Digital Markets Act 2022).

As reflected in section 2.2, fairer competition is not the only challenge posed by current platform governance and business models.

Literature on surveillance and digital labor illustrate that a tension also lies between corporate interest and people's participation and self-determination (Andrejevic, 2009; 2013). While surveillance may take many forms (Staples, 2014); it may be performed by the state, corporations, or at an interpersonal level (Andrejevic, 2004; Lyon, 2007; 2017), the literature that concern privacy issues, data protection, and digital labor often criticize algorithmic and corporate surveillance (Andrejevic, 2013; Bucher, 2017; Ravetto-Biagioli, 2019; Demertzis et al., 2021). While people are not explicitly forced to use social media platforms, their presence and behavior adds value to social media platform companies in opaque ways. It is in turn utilized to make people to stay on platforms, and to provide optimal audiences for advertisements or political messages. This makes them enter into what Sinclair (2012) has termed the "empowerment-exploitation paradox" (p. 81) of social media. Although platform companies' generation and utilization of huge amounts of data based on people's online practices have been focal points for criticisms, scholars have also witnessed shifts and tensions between scholarly utilization of unprecedented 'big data' opportunities enabled by platforms, researchers' "digital positivism" (Fuchs, 2017, np), and critical approaches to social media platforms' generation of data, leading to consolidation to reap the benefits of both computational methods and critical inquiry (e.g., Schafer & Hase, 2023).

The platform economy in other words has its own "rules of strategy" (Van Alstyne et al., 2016, p. 9) in which businesses needs to adapt or strategize against. In the above-mentioned literature, 'the

consumer' is inherent to platform's business models, their economic value creation and market structure. These circumstances provide a backdrop to understand the emergence of social media logics. As is further discussed in Chapter 3, the theory of social media logics and the role of specific action possibilities both stem from and sustain corporate interests. As will be argued, it is not just businesses, institutions and people with societal tasks requiring people's attention that are faced with a certain set of principles. Through the social media logics literature, this thesis zooms in on the role of 'the consumer' in the platform ecosystem (e.g., Van Alstyne et al., 2016), specifically, the user of social media platforms. As will be shown, this focus represents a gap in the social media logics literature.

2.5.1 Social media logics

The concept of social media logics describes the principles underlying how information and communication is handled on social media (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), or, the "rules" of how the social media "game" works (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4654). Developed from "media logic" (Altheide & Snow, 1979), social media logics have been used to explain and understand "practices of content production, distribution, and consumption" on social media platforms (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021, p. 141). Inherent to the theory of social media logics is that the logics are taken for granted. Klinger and Svensson (2015), for instance, argues that this can be seen in perceptions concerning how social media

should be used, and how content there *should be* produced and circulated. I will describe the principles of social media logics in Chapter 3. Here, I give attention to how social media logics has commonly been employed in research.

Researchers have especially mobilized social media logics when investigating news and politics. Social media logics has been proposed as a framework to understand institutionalized news media and political actors in a shifting media landscape where social media platforms increasingly have gained prominence. This makes sense as mass media and politics represent two domains where acquiring people's attention is inherent, and to which social media has challenged traditional attention acquiring trajectories (see, for example, Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Severin-Nielsen, 2023). Social media logics have been employed to understand the practices and strategies of political actors and parties (Klinger, 2013; Kalsnes, 2016a; see also Bossetta, 2018), specifically populist political actors (Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2017; Jacobs & Spierings, 2019), traditional news media (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018; Hermida & Mellado, 2020; Haim et al., 2021; Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2022; Anter, 2023), political communication during election campaigns (Kalsnes, 2016b), and political news learning on social media (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). Research has, for example, suggested that social media logics particularly suits populist actors' strategies (Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2017), does not support compensatory political news learning (Shehat & Strömbäck, 2021), and impact traditional news media (Lischka, 2021; Haim et al., 2021; Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2022).

A more personalized and subjective style has been identified in traditional news media's publications on social media (Hermida & Mellado, 2020), illustrating that journalism needs to negotiate journalistic norms when facing and having to balance, or adapt to, social media logics (e.g., Hurcombe et al., 2021; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019; Haim et al., 2021; Anter, 2023). The personalized aspects of social media have also been witnessed in political communication, where studies have, for example, suggested that "populism thrives on the logic of connective action" (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1123). Populist controversial actors can gain from logics that value emotive and "personalized action frames" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744), circumventing traditional editorial practices with provocative and dividing language (Gillespie, 2018; Jost, 2019; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019; see also Larsson, 2017), which in turn may suit the virality logic of social media (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The latter can be illustrated by terms such as "rage baiting" (e.g., Chen, 2022), that is, the preying "on hostile emotions" (Ihlebæk & Holter, 2021, p. 1218) for engagement (cf. Wollebæk et al., 2019).

Many of these studies hence deal with the ways in which the traditional notion of media logic materializes or transforms as media technologies and formats develop. From a journalism study standpoint, they illuminate scholars' observations of "a shift from mass media logic to social media logic" (Hermida & Mellado, 2020, p. 46). They also reflect questions regarding whether (social) media logics change the inherent practices and norms of other institutions (Eide, 2004;

Strömbäck, 2008; Hjarvard, 2013; Marcinkowski, 2014; Hepp, 2020) such as journalism and politics, or whether they invite certain kinds of journalism (e.g., Hurcombe et al., 2019; see also Djerf-Pierre et al., 2019), or support certain political ideologies and actors (e.g., Engesser et al., 2017). These strands of research also illustrate scholarship scoping more broadly than a social media versus traditional media dichotomy, looking at how institutions are impacted by (and not merely utilize) technological developments (Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008; Domingo et al., 2015) and vice versa (Levina & Hasinoff, 2016; Klinger & Svensson, 2018). The scholarly employment of social media logics illustrates that putting one set of rationales up against or in light of other kinds of institutionalized practices and aims – which can form a kind of logic (e.g., political logic) – enables inquiring into how contesting norms and goals may stand in contrast, may be influenced and (re)shaped.

According to Klinger and Svensson (2018), underlying ideals of social media platforms are "constant updating, connectivity, and responsiveness" (p. 4662). Given that social media platforms operate not just as transmitting technologies, but as spaces where people socialize and participate, however, a central question that remains regards how one can understand the relationship between social media logics and people's participation. Perceptions about how social media should be used likely differ among users, depending on how they (variably) perceive possibilities and constraints of specific platforms. While research on how people perceive and think about algorithms, for example, are growing (e.g., Bucher, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2019;

Hargittai et al., 2020; Swart, 2021), and while researchers acknowledge the role of users in shaping social media logics (e.g., Hermida & Mellado, 2020), users' practices within or negotiations of these logics are scarcely considered. This thesis discusses its findings through this lens, contributing to start filling this research gap. This task, however, also requires recognizing the role of platform specific aspects (Gibbs et al., 2015; Bossetta, 2018; Hermida & Mellado, 2020), which may be overlooked if merely leaning on the concept of social media logics as it often describes traits true for all platforms (Anter, 2023). While platform specific features may lead from and uphold social media logics, they may simultaneously create slightly different communicative environments (e.g., Vásquez-Herrero, 2022). This brings us over to the literature emphasizing platform's different architecture, or structural designs, and their specific action possilibities (e.g., Bossetta, 2018).

2.5.2 Social media platforms' different architectures

Scholars have recognized a tendency in social media research to focus on one specific social media in isolation (Stoycheff et al., 2017; Boczkowski et al., 2018; Rueß et al., 2021; Vásquez-Herrero, 2022) despite most people using a combination of several social media platforms (Horvát & Hargittai, 2021). This matters as there is an interplay between people's perceptions and use of social media platforms and the latters' techno-economic features (van Dijck, 2009; Helmond, 2015). For example, some social media platforms have features that

enable spaces of low anonymity and low visibility (such as private Facebook groups, Instagram's "direct messaging" (dm) groups, and Whatsapp chats), while others facilitate high anonymity and high visibility (in online forums, such as Reddit, and blogs) (Yeshua-Katz & Hård af Segerstad, 2020). Research suggest that people's perception of potential audiences and following social media practices (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017), are shaped by a social media platform's distinct facilitation of combinations of weak and strong ties (e.g., Lu & Hampton, 2017; Goyanes et al., 2021). Features facilitated by platforms may thus encourage and discourage certain user practices (van Dijck et al., 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

The concept of affordances – a term initially introduced by Gibson (1977; 1979) – specifically technological affordances (e.g., Parchoma, 2014), has been used by scholars to talk about and inquire into how social media platforms enable certain actions and behaviors (e.g., Treem & Leonardi, 2016; Karahanna et al., 2018; Yeshua-Katz & Hård af Segerstad, 2020; Trepte, 2021; Theocharis et al., 2022). The concept and application of affordances is, however, contested (see, for example, Oliver, 2005; Parchoma, 2014). Bossetta (2018) consequently argues that it is more feasible to empirically trace and understand action possibilities on different platforms, through focusing on digital architectures. According to Bossetta (2018) this enables recognizing "specific properties" of a technology that may shape, but do not determine, affordances, rather than attempting to assess "the extent to which" (pp. 473-474) a technology actually produce a particular

communication form. For explanatory purposes, he uses the design and usage of stairs as example. It is easier, he claims, to distinguish the architectual design of stairs, their particular "properties" and what they physically enable – in this example, "climbability" – than it is to consider "the extent to which stairs enable climbing" (Bossetta, 2018, p. 476). The latter would for instance also rely on *perceptions of* the action possibilities in question (e.g., Klinger & Svensson, 2018). This thesis does not engage with the scholarly literature or debate on how to define or develop the concept of affordances (see, for example, Parchoma, 2014). Nevertheless, it does highlight that different social media platforms have different or imitating features that impact people's use of social media (Gibbs et al., 2015), and the production and transmission of content (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). In Bosetta's (2018) words, "digital architectures" can be seen as "the technical protocols that enable, constrain, and shape user behavior in a virtual space" (p. 473).

While features may differ between social media platforms, they are not arbitrary but follow social media platform's emphasis on and approach to tailor to certain social media logics. In Langlois and Elmer's (2013) words:

> while I can 'like' something on Facebook and have 'friends', I cannot dislike, or hate or be bored by something and have enemies or people that are very vague acquiantances. The seeming social transparency that is the promise of corporate social media is a construct: the

platform imposes its own logic, and in the case of Facebook, this logic is one of constant connectivity. (p. 10)

Simultaneously as different social media platforms have different "vernaculars" (Gibbs et al., 2015), understood as "platform-centric" "codes and conventions" (Hurcombe et al., 2021, p. 385), features of social media platforms are not necessarily exclusive. The hashtag, for example, is common to many prominent social media platforms. Perceptions and norms may also migrate between social media platforms "as new practices and features from one platform are appropriated for use on others" (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 257). Social media features, however, likely influence people's use of social media in conjunction with people's socially shared meanings and perceptions of those features (e.g., Papacharissi, 2009). Research argues that socially shared meanings shape perceptions of what platforms are to be used for, in what ways, beyond what each platform simply offers in technical architectural terms (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Bossetta, 2018). Furthermore, research suggest that people's needs may motivate which social media are used, in what ways, depending on platforms' ability to meet them (Karahanna et al., 2018; see also Conroy et al., 2012; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). Perceptions about for what and how social media features are to be used are in other words arguably shaped through a negotiation between the possibilities that lies within the technology, designers' choices, and users (Gibbs et al., 2015; Klinger & Svensson, 2018).

These insights stress recognizing and further understanding variances in participation depending on platforms' options and features,

and people's needs, motivations, experiences, perceptions and views of appropriateness. At the same time, the studies above illustrate that while features do not command how people behave online, and would not matter if it weren't for people using them (Manosevitch, 2010), they do shape the communicative environment in ways that can influence people's engagement. Algorithms, for example, play a part in shaping communicative spaces, filtering and performing relevance. They can furthermore be inclined "towards or against normatively positive behavior" (Sandvig et al., 2016, p. 4977; see also, Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019; Obermeyer et al., 2019).

While social media logics enable identifying and understanding inherent 'rules' of the social media platform 'game', recognizing different features within and across platforms invite staying sensitive to the ways in which these social media logics may materialize. To understand its connection, however, we must recognize the back-end level of social media platforms. Abilities to press a 'like' button to 'like' a certain content, visible to users and researchers at the user interface level, namely also operate at a back-end level for the benefit of data construction, analysis and connectivity (e.g., Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013; Langlois & Elmer, 2013), which is inherent to social media logics, and to the benefit of social media corporations. Behind people's social media clicks, follows, and commenting, lies data processing which captures, analyses, and deals with these interactions as data, enabling data flows within and across platforms (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). This data processing is usually 'invisible' from the user interface level, but can

occasionally be experienced by users, as it is 'brought back', through content or 'friending'/'following' recommendations (Langlois & Elmer, 2013). We can thus see how action possibilities "allow for the recording of further data", and further, how they support social media logics (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 10). Analysing how people perceive and use social media, and (de)emphasize their different features, compared to the function these features perform to social media logics, can "thus yield greater knowledge and awareness as to how corporate social media logics enter into participatory processes" (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 12). Article 2 is particularly employed for the purpose of grasping such perceptions and evaluations.

2.6   Summary

This literature review has identified one overarching area that warrants further examination, namely how social media platforms invite and are negotiated as participatory spaces. The scarcely considered relationship between participation and social media logics enables an appropriate avenue into this topic. Analyzing this interplay enables further understanding how social media invite certain kinds of communication and participation forms, both in terms of interaction between people in public conversations, expressions aimed at larger audiences, and when it comes to participatory practices not easily grasped if merely inquiring into visible participation on social media. Highlighting logics underlying such spaces requires that one recognizes, for instance, the impact of

personalization, virality, and datafication on people's understanding and use of social media. As this literature review has shown, Instagram and TikTok are appropriate platforms to scrutinize the visible interaction traces that pertains to public conversations and personalization respectively. While they have both grown to become two of the most used and rapidly growing social media platforms (Fishwick, 2020; Kemp, 2022), Instagram represent a social media where conversations are not yet sufficiently researched and TikTok represent a platform where personalization is deemed highly prominent and unprecedented. At the same time, social media continuously develop and people may become increasingly accustomed to their logics. Three studies are thus mobilized to inform the relationship between social media logics and participation:

1. Comment sections on Instagram, a scarcely considered place for societal conversation; 2. people's usage and perceptions of social media as communicative spaces, as social media develop and as people may increasingly become accustomed to their logics; and 3. personalized content feeds, particularly the content feed of TikTok.

These different approaches to social media participation help inform the above-mentioned research gap as identified in this literature review, namely: the scarce research on the relationship between participation and social media logics. Filling this gap 1) expands the social media logics scholarship to also include the relevance of logics to people's social and democratic life, 2) emphasizes how social media

platforms adapt to social media logics in different ways, and 3) highlights contingencies in the interplay between platforms' business models as structuring frameworks for social and public spaces, and people's participation, as utilizing, resisting, or adapting such circumstances. As the question of how public discussions occur online and who uses social media for what purposes are often studied separately (see Strandberg, 2008; Vatnøy, 2017 for two exceptions), the various areas that the sub-studies investigate are beneficial in conjunction, as they enable inquiring into various dimensions of participation. The sensitizing concepts conversation, orientation, and resistance illuminate the broad, exploratory, and sensitive approach to participation as a non-conclusive concept, facilitated through these different studies. The next chapter describes the theoretical framework mobilized for this purpose.

3   Theoretical Perspectives

A theory shines light on certain matters while darkening others; it neglects a great deal for the purpose of human comprehension. Hence, rather than providing complete and objective representations of reality, theories "shape an object of study and highlight relevant issues" (van der Walt, 2020, p. 65). They are commonly built from "accumulated knowledge, organized by the human mind, to be used for purposes of explanation" (Mjøset, 2006, p. 337). While what should be understood by both "explanation" and "knowledge" here are grounds for discussions (Vassenden, 2018), this definition makes clear that we employ theories to understand things around us, pragmatically, in curiosity or necessity.

The theoretical insights presented in this chapter reflect my assumption that the logics that play a part in shaping a communicative space can be explored through people's participation. This has also been reflected in the literature review. While the operalization of research questions invites different entrances to participation, they do not provide a complete representation of all the possible ways one can study participation. Neither do the theoretical insights I mobilize to understand the findings. I have rather employed certain sensitizing concepts as I believe they provide productive entrances to the "object of study" (van der Walt, 2020, p. 65). While the sensitizing concepts grew out of my familiarization with previous research and theory relevant to social media participation, they were also open to change depending on empirical findings. To employ and understand the sensitizing concepts,

the empirical findings needed to be able to inform them (e.g., Blumer, 1954). This is further described in the methods chapter. As will be reflected in this chapter, the research questions provide a pragmatic approach and a juggling of theoretical insights. This was deemed appropriate as the different sets of materials speak to different aspects of participation. Being open to juggling theoretical insights, and being pragmatic about doing so, enabled an empirically sensitive approach. At the same time, I was incentivized by my research question, and limited by the theoretical glasses I wore before this thesis work started, oriented towards a broad conceptualization of participation under a public sphere framework.

3.1   Introduction

The studies in this thesis are informed by theoretical insights from public sphere theory. This chapter outlines theories that enable a mobilization of the sensitizing concepts – orientation, conversation, resistance – and overarching theory that brings the different studies together. Before moving on to the theoretical framework, I will explain the rationale underlying the employment and connection of central terms.

When employing the term 'public' in this thesis, I mean "accessible to everyone" (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 139). When speaking

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about *a public space*, I therefore mean a space[11] that is accessible to everyone. Social media platforms have become assumed natural public spaces in countries such as Norway where they are highly accessible and used (Newman et al., 2023; SSB, 2023). This thesis is positioned in the public sphere and participatory tradition. I am thus primarily interested in the relevance of social media logics to people's acts as citizens, as opposed to, for instance, how people act as consumers or clients. By looking at how people act as citizens, the focus of this thesis is on participatory practices oriented towards the public and its issues.

When I employ the term 'public matters' in this thesis, I mean issues that are commonly recognized as "of concern to everyone" (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 140), in the sense that they are relevant to society's conversations and problem solving (Young, 2002). In these perspectives, it is only participants (often in effect a majority) that decides what is recognized as a common concern, illustrating that the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' matters are not fixed or 'natural' (Young, 2002; Fraser, 1990/2010). As consequence, Fraser (1990/2010) points out, societal recognitions must often be fought over by marginalized groups. Such groups have often aimed to make a thus far considered private matter to become public, or aimed to gain a publics' attention to matters not yet (sometimes sufficiently or in

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[11] See, for example, Ozkul (2013) and Graham (1998) for more comprehensive discussions of conceptions of digital place and space than what this thesis contributes.

satisfying ways) recognized, such as a state's military operations, counter terrorism measures, or necessary climate crisis strategies.

This view of public matters is closely related to how this thesis sees 'the political' – as nonconstant and shaped beyond institutionalized politics. It leans on a "broadening of the political, where all social realities become (at least potentially) contestable and politicized" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 40), meaning that "the notions of democracy and participation can no longer remain confined to the fields of institutionalized politics" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 40). In these perspectives, formal rights and behaviors such as voting and/or electing representatives are necessary, but not sufficient, in large-scale democracies (cf. Schumpeter, 1943/2003 for a minimalist notion).

People engage in the disputes and (re)constructions of – and learn and make up their minds about – public matters through participating in public spaces. There are, however, several ways in which participation unfolds. The sensitizing concepts, whose theoretical relevance will be established in this chapter, are used as analytical tools to tap into how participation can be understood and informed. Sensitizing concepts typically lack precise and fixed characteristics (Blumer, 1954), and have few or non-objective and clear empirical instances against which they can be measured (e.g., Patton, 1990). They are, nevertheless, grounded in theory.

Public sphere theory is used pragmatically for this purpose. Theoretical perspectives within this tradition highlight normative

expectations to participation and to the media as central arenas within democracy. They thus enable the evaluation of how mediated interactions and expressions play out against participatory ideals. Participatory ideals as a starting point are particularly relevant given their integration in the Norwegian legal framework. The social and political relevance of the deliberative democratic tradition can for example be witnessed throughout the history of the nation's democratic project (Kalleberg, 2016). It was especially highlighted and enforced by the revision of the Norwegian constitution's Article 100 about freedom of expression in 1999, in effect from 2004 (Kalleberg, 2016; NOU 1999: 27). This is explicitly expressed in its last subsection reading: "The authorities of the state shall create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse" (NOU 2022: 9b, p. 7). This article is, compared to its counterparts Article 10 in the European human rights convention and, to a lesser extent, Article 19 in the UN-convention about civil and political rights, not just first and foremost individually oriented, but also includes an institutional aspect of freedom of speech (Kalleberg, 2016). It entails that freedom of expression has (1) a democratic reason; legitimizing policy lines, decision making, and authorities, (2) a truth-seeking reason; it enables being corrected and correcting others in aiming for knowledge, and (3) is the state's responsibility; "The state should facilitate an open and informed public conversation" (Article 100). Hence, it is considered the state's responsibility to secure unconstrained discussion, as communication has been regarded pivotal and constituting to society (NOU 1999: 27), and to not leave the establishment, operation,

and development of public spaces where communication and information is produced, distributed, and discussed, to market forces (NOU 1999: 27). In Habermasian terms, this facilitates that practices of communicative rationality – intentional and meaningful activity aimed towards a cooperative search for understanding and/or the best argument – can be conducted publicly, across distances (e.g., Kalleberg, 2016).

Multiple perspectives, and the consideration and representation of opinions, should be secured in this rationale. The echoing of the deliberative tradition can further be seen in the reasoning of securing freedom of expression for the purpose of legitimizing power making and power holders. The latter is inherent to the theory of communicative power, stemming from the Habermasian deliberative democratic tradition. This concept ties together communicative processes, particularly citizens' discussions in the public sphere, and legitimization of power. Here, perspectives and experiences expressed and carried by the media melt into the opinion-formation processes on political matters in the public sphere, and through these avenues may eventually also impact decision-making or legitimization (Habermas, 2006). Communicative power thus suggests that legitimization happen as people's considered opinions and collective perspectives, stemming from their engagement in conversations in the public sphere, are transported into and influence the political institutional and administrative domain. For a proper consideration of opinions, all opinions and viewpoints need to be represented in these discussions, and furthermore, all views need to be represented for such discussion to be

able to legitimize power. Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere thus carries a vital role beyond providing spaces where citizens can come together to "form opinions and desires", as it is also an "intermediary domain between state and society" (2009, pp. 139-141). The state's responsibility in securing the infrastructure for communication, according to Article 100, should enable people to *act* communicatively and have influence on political power and decision-making. These participatory ideals of an informed and active citizenry, "able and motivated to take an active part" (Syvertsen et al., 2014, p. 24) are reflected in Nordic media systems at large. While the infrastructural conditions for participation remain the responsibility of the state, many factors influence how participation unfolds in practice, including how public spaces enable action, how technology shapes the logics of participation, and how people perceive different arenas where action is invited.

The following discussion is divided in two parts. The first part deals with theories that have informed my three sensitizing concepts. The second part first focuses on how social media platforms are perceived as public spaces according to the deliberative tradition, revisiting the topics about the commercial incentives of social media platforms and social media logics. The second part then discusses the question of social medias' influence on perceptions and practices in the public sphere. In the following, I will introduce participation as seen with public sphere glasses, before moving to participation ideals as proposed by the democratic deliberation tradition. Then, I will move beyond such ideals,

and discuss the relevance of other types of conversations and expressions to the democratic conversation, followed by a discussion that especially considers the participatory practice of public orientation, or 'monitorial practices'. After these sections, I introduce worries about a commercial intrusion in democratic life, before describing the platform economy as background to understand social media logics. Then, I outline the theoretical perspectives of social media logics. By describing discussions about epistemic unease, visiting technological determinism and social constructivism, I lastly visit the topic of social media platforms' influence.

3.2   *Participation through public sphere lenses*

The value and importance of citizens' participation in democracy through public interactions and communication is central to public sphere theory. Theoretical frameworks within this tradition commonly emphasize the democratic functions that happen outside of formal institutions and focus on opinion making processes and bottom-up discussions. Civic life is central to participation in the public sphere tradition. It is here that information, expressions, and interactions take place, where these exchanges are distributed and accessed among a public, and thus where people act as citizens, orienting themselves towards the larger society and its members. Part of unconstrained participation and democratic resilience in large scale societies is in the media's ability to provide independent public arenas, free from

participatory barriers, fulfilling communication between multiple perspectives (Habermas, 1992/1996). Scholars emphasize that participation however entails more than discussing already established views, positions, and preferences. Fraser (1990) for example argues that as people take part in public discussions, they participate in the shaping of identities, preferences, perspectives, and public issues. People thus participate in molding politics. Representation of positions and opinions are (re)shaped through these processes. Struggles for social recognition (see Driessens & Nærland, 2022)–where resistance towards dominating understandings or naturalized exclusions are inherent–illustrate such processes.

Scholars have also argued that participation is more than visible partaking (e.g., Couldry et al., 2010). People can participate in ways that fuel public connection without taking part in public conversations (Moe, 2020). For example, by observing mediated public debates, people can learn, keep track of, negotiate, and form their opinions and perspectives, internally (Schudson, 1998) or in private settings (Papacharissi, 2014). Through such practices, scholars suggest, people gain shared references prompting further participation and belonging (Berlant, 2008; Couldry et al., 2010; Ytre-Arne, 2011; Swart et al., 2018). These perspectives will be further outlined after delving into a central participatory ideal within public sphere theory, namely citizens' partaking in public conversations. The following section will describe ideal ways of how to partake according to the deliberative tradition, before presenting theories that

suggest scholars may benefit from going beyond such ideals if the aim is to understand better how people participate in public conversations.

3.2.1 Conversation: To partake publicly

People taking part in public conversations is one central normative assumption about participation stemming from the deliberative tradition. Habermas (1994) proposes the deliberative model as an alternative to the liberal and republican models of democracy. According to him, the liberal and republican models have contrasting views on how opinion making processes take place. Whereas the liberal model is based on the aggregation of isolated individuals' competing opinions in mechanical market processes, the republican model is based on citizens' collective orientations, acting as a "macro subject" (Habermas, 1994, p. 4) of shared values and established "ethical convictions" (Habermas, 1994, p. 8). The deliberative model is proposed to solve inherent issues within these two models while bridging some of their valuable elements. One such problem, according to Habermas, lies with the liberal model's assumption that rational isolated individuals act as within a market (e.g., Hayek, 1984; Nozick, 1974). Another problem lies with the republican model's assumption that all citizens' will have a collective sense and that their actions will be orientated towards a common good (e.g., Walzer, 1984; Taylor, 1975). Instead of focusing on subjects' inherent consciousness (Habermas, 1994, p. 8) – i.e., on isolated individuals or on the acting collective – Habermas emphasizes the process of

communication, whereby considered opinions and collective agreement are key to the decision-making process. The deliberative model suggests that in complex large-scale societies, communicative processes of *communicative action* (should) decide and influence political power. Civil society is thus separated both from the economic system as well as from the state (Habermas, 1994).

Although the deliberative tradition comes in many different versions (see e.g., Elster, 1998; Cohen, 2009; Hardin, 2009; Landemore, 2012), ideal participation is seen as an engaged and responsive citizenry, where discussions between citizens are open and equal (see e.g., Habermas, 1994; Benhabib, 1996; Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009). This stems from the tradition's emphasis on the decision-making processes in democratic societies. Democratic society's decisions should not be a result of power or self-interest, but of citizens' critical, reflective, and reciprocal debates (Cohen, 1986). The best reasons should steer political decisions. Partaking is facilitated through discussions' openness to all potential onlookers (Habermas, 1992/1996). Here, multiple sources of information can enter common discussions, which will support discoveries of more perspectives on what is 'truth' (Talisse, 2005) and informed opinions, and the citizenry can act as an "enlightened public" (Habermas, 1992/1996, p. 378), consequently leading to more informed and critically evaluated political decisions (Talisse, 2005; Bohman, 2006). These normative assumptions about participation are reflected in

how the public sphere has been described, as a place[12] where "private people come together as a public" (Habermas 1989/1991, p. 27), and as

> a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes). The streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions. (Habermas, 1992/1996, p. 360)

It is also echoed in how scholars have come to define *a public*. For example, Bernhard Peters describes a public as: "a loosely bounded mass of laypersons which are connected by continuous processes of cultural transmission and communication" (1997, p. 5). The public sphere has hence been thought of as constituting the spaces where citizens can come together and share information, their opinions, work through and figure out their political interests and social needs with other citizens. The media has consequently been seen as crucial for the mediation and distribution of information across large-scale societies, further promoting people's urge to learn and their abilities to criticize, and motivation to actively partake in discussions (Wessler, 2018).

The deliberative tradition furthermore holds normative assumptions about *how* people should participate when they partake in public discussions. Often building on Habermas' discourse ethics (e.g.,

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[12] "The public sphere" is throughout this thesis often employed in the singular form, although it is empirically plural (see, for example, Calhoun, 1992; Hauser, 1999; Fraser, 2010; Dicenzo et al., 2011).

Habermas 1983/1990), deliberative scholars are known to promote a dialogue where everyone is oriented towards mutual understanding, where there is a careful consideration of justified opinions, and where the best arguments lead discussants to a consensus, rather than compromise. The purpose of 'deliberation', in this sense, is to ensure that opinions are thought through, or 'considered'. A distinction should thus be noted between the deliberative model of democracy, as a democratic tradition, and deliberative communication as certain (ideal) ways to communicate. Chambers (2009) differentiates these as "theories of deliberative democracy" and "theories of democratic deliberation". While theories of democratic deliberation (as is outlined in the following) describe perspectives emphasizing deliberative communication forms' value to democracy, instances of empirical scarcity of such communication do not undermine theories of deliberative democracy (e.g., Young, 2006/2012).

Habermas (2021) argues that when people participate in public discussions in ideal ways, they engage in "communicative action" or "rational discourse" (p. 109); the former "naively", and the latter when "validity claims have become problematic" (p. 109), and when exchange of reasons for their assessment are needed. People engaging in communicative action attempt to come to an agreement about their shared situation and future action (Habermas, 1981/1984). Communicative action relies on communicative rationality, *the approach to* communicating with others when reaching for genuine and shared understanding and agreement (Habermas, 1981/1984).

Communicative rationality is thus also involved in rational discourse, which is resorted to when the 'rightness' of validity is questioned and one must engage in a cooperative "competition for better reasons" (Habermas, 2006, p. 413). In a Habermasian sense, being (communicatively) rational does not mean being right, then, but "being able to defend or discard reasons with better reasons, based on experience and criticism" (Kalleberg, 2016, p. 27, my translation). Habermas provides benchmarks for when discussions are rational, then, and ties together rationality and discussion (cf. Blau, 2019). He proposed the ideal speech situation as a thought experiment where life-constraints were absent (Wessler, 2018), while theorizing the empirical possibility of communicative rationality and action from people's everyday conversations, where giving and asking for reasons are inherent (Habermas, 2006). Scholars have thus claimed that it continues to represent ideals that can be used to criticize and evaluate real-life conditions, for example in terms of unequal access to or treatment in public discussions, and as ideals to reach for, for example in its emphasis on considering all arguments in search for the better solution (e.g., Wessler, 2018).

Habermas' concept of rationality opposes instrumental rationality, echoed in the self-interest orientation and aggregative model often confined to liberal democratic models. Meanwhile, critics have highlighted the implications of the rationality posed by Habermas. Scholars have criticized the aim towards "a final rational resolution" (Mouffe, 2000b, p. 9) in real-life conditions of diversity, and the

emphasis on rationality, as distinct from and above emotions, and as driving forces of democratic participation and enhancement (e.g., Mouffe, 2000b; Gripsrud, 2008; Nærland, 2014). Others have criticized Habermas conception of rationality as resting on a wrongful distinction from and conceptualization of instrumental and strategic, or "means-ends", rationality (e.g., Blau, 2019; see also Johnson, 1991). While some critics discuss the ontological problems or dimensions of Habermas' conception of rationality, others have criticized its empirical scarcity. As mentioned in the literature review, Habermas' description of democratic deliberation has often been used as point of departure in research on online discussions (Dahlberg, 2007; Chadwick, 2009). Such research has suggested that these ideals pose high (and unrealistic) demands. The thought experiment of an ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1991/1996) where life-constraints are absent, fulfilling equality and critical 'rational' evaluations, is rarely met empirically (Wessler, 2018).

The deliberative conversation ideals shape specific normative assumptions about people's participation in public discussions. First, *partaking* is a normative assumption. Second, *the way* one partakes is a central focus. The next section will further outline that participation is more multifaceted than the classical deliberative normative assumptions about *how* one should speak up when choosing to do so.

3.2.2 Beyond deliberative conversation ideals

Reflected in social realities and emphasized by rhetorical scholarship, there are many ways to take part in public conversations (Hauser, 1999; Kjeldsen, 2018). Communication that does not fit deliberative boxes also matter to societal discussions, public matter contestation, decision-making, and how people connect to each other and the larger public (Vatnøy, 2017; Andersen, 2020). Vernacular talk is, for example, considered to play a central role to the identification and understanding of problems, and the learning and development of social and political issues (Hauser, 1999). Questions pertaining to *the grounds for* opinion making processes and decisions, like 'who we are' and 'who we would like to be', are constantly raised and fought over in different ways, on different arenas (Kjeldsen, 2016; 2018). These types of negotiations do not necessarily follow deliberative conversational footsteps. Closely related to these insights that we may find in rhetorical perspectives, is scholarship emphasizing that cultural expressions may carry political and societal functions. Cultural expressions have proven useful to the identification of new public matters, prompting issues' presence and contestation, creating empathy for other differently situated people and experiences, and public connection (Gripsrud, 2008; Young, 1997; 2002; Ytre-Arne, 2011; Nærland, 2014; 2018). These insights speak to the continuous (re)construction and negotiations of 'private' and 'public' matters (Fraser, 1990/2010); that any distinction between 'private' and 'public' matters is not given but constructed, through "discursive contestation" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67), a perspective pointed to in the

beginning of this chapter when discussing the term of 'public matters'. Scholars have highlighted that such construction, furthermore, can serve particular interests, and often, power positions (Benhabib, 1992). Fraser (1990), for instance, argues that confining something to the private, as a 'private matter', delegitimizes "some interests, views, and topics" (p. 73) while it "valorize others" (p. 73).

Political construction and contestation can thus also happen when people address and discuss matters otherwise confined to 'the personal' and 'the private'. Expressions and conversations about matters considered personal or private can give insight about people's lives and challenges, and their relation to policies, societal structures, and "social phenomena" (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004, p. 285; Ytre-Arne, 2012). News media primarily reporting about 'hard news', such as formal political discourse, and investigative journalism, are typically less able to convey such matters and prompt such insights (e.g., Sjøvaag, 2015). Social media platforms and logics, however, highlights 'the personal' and personal expressions (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). This makes social media platforms exquisite sites for disruptions of personal-political dichotomies, and for the creation of knowledge, understanding, and connection between different life experiences (e.g., Berlant, 2008; Ytre-Arne, 2011). Vernacular talk, cultural expressions, and negotiations between public and private matters, are, as has been illustrated by the literature review chapter, often found in social media, stemming from people's contributions rather than editorial decision making. Scholars have accordingly argued that one needs to reach beyond strict

deliberative measures to assess how conversations play out in online arenas, and to understand their democratic place. Almost 20 years ago, Dahlgen (2005), for example, witnessed that with the internet, people were "exploring new ways of being citizens and doing politics" (p. 159).

This does not mean that one needs to discount aims towards agreement and decision-making, or discard the potential of deliberation to enhance learning or to inform political opinion making. While deliberative efforts may indeed fail, and prompt what they aimed to counter in practice (see e.g., Karpowitz & Mansbridge, 2005), they have also succeeded in bridging understandings, conquering tensions between parties, and providing better solutions for all involved (e.g., Forester, 1999; Fishkin, 1995; Melville et al., 2005). Habermas argues that studies confirming the valuable impact of deliberation in such instances have corroborated "the expected impact of deliberation on the formation of considered political opinion(s)" (Habermas, 2006, p. 414). The need for and impact of deliberation at the "center of the political system" (Habermas, 2006, p. 415), in what Fraser (1990/2010) would term "strong" publics, that is, in political opinion and decision-making bodies, continue to be relevant (e.g., Habermas, 2006). That is, in a Habermasian view, especially if they are influenced by deliberation in 'the periphery', acquiring communicative power.

While not all communication should be evaluated *according to* deliberative communicative ideals, Habermas' ideal speech situation can, as mentioned, be used as a tool for inquiry (Chambers, 2009). It can

be used to find missing pieces, or potentials for improvement in (circumstances around) public conversations. In Edgar's (2006) words: "actual debates will systematically exclude certain people, or inhibit the raising of certain complaints or topics. The notion of an ideal speech situation explains why this state of affairs is morally and politically wrong" (p. 67). For example, it theorizes why some forms of communication needs to exclude dominating views in order to form a shared language and understanding about not yet established matters that only a minority has insight into, due to their lack of room in ordinary mainstream conversations, in their resistance towards the exclusions forcing their existence.

As this section has outlined, while the deliberative perspective provides tools to measure the 'quality' of some public conversations, and their demanding requirements and "high standards […] are useful and necessary to define directions, even if we realize that reality often falls short of the ideals" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 156), they do not encompass all kinds of public conversations relevant to democracy. Other perspectives, such as those found in rhetorical scholarship, are needed to fully grasp other communication forms that *also* matters to the larger democratic conversation. Although democratic deliberation ideals can be used as yardsticks, they do not explain all conversation relevant to deliberative democracy.

3.2.3 Orientation: Monitorial practices and private conversations

Active partaking in public discussions is often presented as the most crucial way participation takes place when leaning on the deliberative tradition. For example, even if communicative forms do not live up to communicative ideals or circumstances, a healthy society can be reached, according to Habermas (2006), as long as citizens are engaged and responsive, through voicing their opinions, naming problems, and responding to what is addressed and circulated in the conversations played before them.

Some critics have taken this ideal at face value, hence deeming it untenable, for instance pointing out that public sphere participation ideals stand in contrast to the participation found in real life democracies. Rather, "all or even very many […] do not appear to participate" (Dryzek, 2001, p. 651). Furthermore, critics highlight that even if conversations are open to all, not all people have the resources to take part in public discussions on equal terms, as their different backgrounds and rhetorical capabilities puts them in different power positions (e.g., Ahlström-Vij, 2012). Critics have also pointed out how, even if all members of a public did share the same communicative capabilities and possibilities, deliberative goals may still not be tenable due to the time and effort required to fulfill the deliberative process' demands (Christiano, 2018). Being informed about political matters and evaluate questions in social reality to the extent that deliberative procedures ask puts heavy and unrealistic demands on citizens. Only a minority is likely

to have such competencies about any given issue (Ahlström-Vij, 2012) [13], either due to being experts in particular fields, or due to their social position and everyday life providing exclusive insight into certain matters (e.g., Dahl, 1956; Young, 2002). As response to such criticisms, some scholars have emphasized the opportunity to participate, rather than the actual participation by 'all', as measurement of whether a society's ultimate decisions are democratically legitimate or not, in line with the deliberative model (e.g., Cohen, 1997). To this solution, critics have claimed that stretching such an opportunity-assessment over an assessment that considers active partaking could undermine the arguments by deliberative democratic theory itself, towards an elitist democratic theory (see e.g., Schumpeter, 1943/2003; Lippmann, 1925). Besides, what are the threshold or measures for whether one has the 'opportunity to' participate?

To these criticisms against the deliberative model, deliberative scholars' defense has for instance been that the tradition's normative core emphasizes rather than overlooks how inequality and power undermines democracy (Scudder, 2023). It is valuable for critical purposes, as it invites highlighting and scrutinizing how inequality in deliberation debilitate democracy. In Scudder's (2023) words, the deliberative tradition theorizes that "democracy amounts to having your voice heard and your perspective considered by your fellow citizens and

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[13] This also points to the larger debate between elitist democratic theory (see e.g., Schumpeter, 1943/2003; Dahl, 1970) and participatory democratic theory.

representatives" (p. 253), and while "most things in our political lives are" not "democracy-enhancing", "they are democracy-relevant" (p. 251).

As researchers have continued valuing the active partaking in public discussions, people's unwillingness to partake in public discussions online has accordingly been problematized, researched, and theorized. Concepts such as "context collapse" (boyd, 2014) have for example described that the internet lacks boundaries between stable audiences (Jensen, 2007), which may function as preventive mechanisms for people to become engaged in public discussions. While such studies focusing on 'non-participation' (e.g., Ahmed & Lee, 2023) provide important insight about obstacles to people's visible partaking in public discussions, they do not deal with the entirety of participation as a concept (e.g., Skoric et al., 2016).

For example, rather than participating visibly in collective discussions, or in the traditional political realm (for example through membership in political parties), people can participate 'invisibly' (Schudson, 1998; Norris, 2003). Papacharissi's "private publics" (2014) for example reflect that observation and orientation to the public, without explicit public partaking, also constitute participation. Observation and orientation may reflect the democratic relevance of communication and reflection in the *private*, rather than in the public sphere, in digital society. Private publics can emerge as "privately contained activities with a public scope" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 153). These spaces are

socially motivated, while occasionally or partly oriented towards a larger public. To that end, these practices do not entail 'non-participation', but rather, non-public participation. Observing as democratic practice is emphasized by Michael Schudson's (1998; 2000) "the monitorial citizen". People can become "informed enough and alert enough" (Schudson, 2000, p. 16) through observing others. According to Schudson (1998; 2000), monitorial citizens depart from their monitorial behavior by participating visibly when they consider it necessary.

Schudon (2000) makes clear that not only is observing others' conversations and expressions an inherent part of democracy. Striving to observe all kinds of matters that may be relevant to one's life to a degree where on is completely informed about them, is a difficult and demanding task most citizens cannot devote time and effort to (see also, Ahlström-Vij, 2012; Christiano, 2018). This is in line with other scholars' criticisms of the untenable ideal of citizens being fully informed (e.g., Moe, 2020) and both impossibility and undesirability of 'all' citizens' continuous partaking in public discussions (e.g., Walzer, 1999). Building on Schudson, Moe (2020) similarly describes a citizen that has the competencies to perform citizenship through for example gaining further information about an issue when deemed necessary. Paying attention to and collecting information from others' discussions and expressions may be particularly enabled in current media environments, facilitating (continued) information abundance (e.g., Keane, 2009; 2018).

Papacharissi (2010; 2014) and Schudson (1998; 2000)[14] thus explicitly invite a more multifaceted picture of participation. One the one hand, participation can occur together with others in "private publics", socially motivated but publicly oriented (see also Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). On the other hand, it can also be sparked through more individualized forms. As observers, as "listeners" and "readers" (Habermas, 1992/1996, pp. 373-374), people may also engage in a form of participatory practice. Concepts such as "private publics" and "the monitorial citizen" illustrate that being an 'active citizen' is not necessarily univocally equated with visibly taking part in discussions with already made up opinions. One can be or become interested in politics through different avenues (Norris, 2003), and form political opinions through reading, listening, and viewing information (Habermas, 2006). Listening is also a democratic necessity and merit. In Dewey's (1927/1991) words, "vision is a spectator, hearing is a participator" (p. 219). Other scholars have termed this "democratic listening" (Wessler, 2018, p. 159), or emphasized the role of the internet for "social media listening" (Crawford, 2011, p. 67), or "active spectating" (Solverson, 2023).

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[14] Critics of towards Schudson have claimed that he proposes or legitimizes a passive citizen, and a democratic practice only achievable for the "well-informed happy few" (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007, p. 251), to which he has responded that, on the contrary, while the citizen does not need to be fully informed about all matters at all times, the citizen is "informed enough and alert enough to identify danger" to personal and public life (Schudson, 2000, p. 16). Furthermore, he has argued that he never meant to say that the monitorial citizen should replace citizenship at large; he simply argued it should be recognized as co-existing with and as a "modification of" other deliberative models (Schudson, 2000, p. 16).

Spectatorship can in other words contribute to public connection, learning, and a preparedness to act when necessary (Moe, 2020). Likewise, while "private publics" (Papacharissi, 2014), could fuel fears that the internet engenders polarization among citizens, a decline in discussions among differently positioned people (Habermas, 2006) and hence contribute to democratic decline (Sunstein, 2001; 2017; Pariser, 2011), they can facilitate public connection and feelings of belonging to a larger community (Berlant, 2008; Ytre-Arne, 2011). Social media platforms can develop as spaces where people form and play out public connection, understood as "shared frames of reference that enable them to engage and participate within their cultural, social, civic and political networks" (Swart et al., 2018, p. 4331; see also Couldry et al., 2010). As Couldry and colleagues (2010, p. 6) contend, public connection in this context can be understood as an "abstraction that isolates a complex component of a working democracy" where *orientation to* the public is inherent. Public connection can thus be reached through an active attention to or visible partaking in the parts of the public where public issues are voiced, fought over, worked through, and discussed (Couldry et al., 2010).

The sections above are not meant to imply that a lack of visible participation necessarily equates to invisible participation forms. While it may be true, especially considering the possibilities of the internet, that "in our societies, being monitorial could be a more apt norm for citizens when performing their role in democracy" (Moe, 2020, p. 213), scholars also need to unpack the "aspects of monitoring" (Ytre-Arne & Moe,

2018, p. 242). For example, as the meaning of 'public connection' has changed, partly as result of a changing media environment (Couldry et al., 2010), Couldry and colleagues suggest listening to people's own thoughts and experiences to grasp public connection in these circumstances. People's "everyday practices of media consumption" (Couldry et al., 2010, p. 5) are here pivotal. Studies on the Scandinavian population have emphasized that rather than replacing previous participation forms, monitorial citizenship partly complements other participation forms (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007). This illustrates that rather than being a form suited to a transformation thesis of participation, entailing a new versus old participation dichotomy, the 'monitorial citizen' concept should be placed in a pluralization thesis (see Hustinx et al., 2012). The outlining so far thus merely argues that participation is *more multifaceted* than the classical deliberative normative assumptions about 'speaking up' in public discussions. In Crawford's (2011) words, speaking specifically about the online world, we should acknowledge both "speaking and listening" as "important forms of online participation" (p. 67).

3.2.4 Resistance: Fights for societal recognition

As part of scholars' criticisms towards Habermas (1989) initial conceptualization of an ideal singular bourgeois public sphere, counter-public theory emphasizes the need to consider the role that power and dominance play to what voices and issues are represented, legitimized,

or excluded (Negt & Kluge, 1974; Fraser, 1990/2010). Counter-public theory theorizes how marginalized individuals may come together to form their own language and aims, before reaching out the larger public for representation, recognition, and political change (Negt & Kluge, 1974; Fraser, 1990/2010). The term "counter-publics" is used and defined differently by different scholars (e.g., Choi & Cho, 2017; Jackson et al., 2018), and the literature is not coherent as to what makes a counter-public 'counter' (Aasen & Brouwer, 2001). The contingent circumstances affecting whether, and the extent to which, counter-publics should enter and cooperate within institutions and the public sphere is furthermore contested (Dryzek, 1996; Dryzek & Dunleavy, 2009; Mouffe, 2000a; Young, 2000). Nevertheless, these contestations illustrate that resistance to domination (e.g., Negt & Kluge, 1974) is seen pivotal to actualize counter-public existence and objectives.

Aasen (2000) has suggested that counter-publics are best characterized by their addressing of "exclusion and the practices that sustain it as explicit themes of discourse" (p. 440) and through their imagination of "themselves explicitly as alternative collectives" (p. 440). To that end, members of counter-publics can be composed of, for instance, different "gender, class, ethnic, and ideological standpoints" (Squires, 2002, p. 465), and speak out against a set of social, legal, or political exclusions (Aasen, 2000). Counter-public presence is not first and foremost a question of identity, however, but of social hierarchies that are built upon a mobilization of identities in order to differentiate (Young, 2000). Scholars have theorized how conditions that constitute

such social hierarchies, and hence individuals' and groups' positions in society (Young, 2000), can be found in political, economic, social, and cultural realms (Squires, 2002).

Counter-publics are also differentiated from enclaves – although they are "often involuntarily *enclaved*" (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 137) – which is why Fraser (1990/2010) emphasize their disputing effect; arguing that they *widen* the democratic conversation (see also Calhoun, 1992). In this view, counter-publics are inherently oriented towards the main public sphere, aiming to convince about and hence eradicate societal injustices. Fraser (1990/2010) for example argues that counter-publics assume "a publicist orientation" (p. 137), fitting to Habermas' ideals and descriptions of the ways in which perspectives and information travels in and impact democratic societies (Habermas, 1992/1996). In Habermas' (2006) words:

> Associational networks of civil society and special interest groups translate the strain of pending social problems and conflicting demands for social justice into political issues. Actors of civil society articulate political interests and confront the state with demands arising from the life worlds of various groups. With the legal backing of voting rights, such demands can be strengthened by threatening to withdraw legitimation. (p. 417)

Counter-publics, however, due to their marginalized and exclusionary position, can often only acquire attention in the general public in times of crisis, through "controversial presentation in the

media" (1992/1996, p. 381) according to Habermas. New problems, as well as flawed and insufficient assumptions can thus come to the fore, forcing publics to tackle its norms and perceptions (Peters, 1997). Despite the accuracy or extent of this crisis-thesis, these insights work to highlight the existence of counter-publics and their resistance to dominating understandings as contingent on historical context, on social, political, and economic situations.

Theoretically, counter-publics have a dual nature: "they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 137) and simultaneously "function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 137). In other words, scholars' theorizations illustrate that at certain stages, counter-publics need to position themselves directly counter to "some other, wider public" (Aasen, 2000, p. 440). This may include an exclusion of certain (dominating) views and perspectives. An 'in group' focus – at first sight seeming neither inclusive nor tolerant towards other opinions or perspectives – has been shown to be positive for eventually making a common concern visible and creating attention to it in larger parts of the public (Fraser, 2010; Dicenzo et al., 2011), enabling an expansion of rights. This illustrates how communication that enhance engagement while limiting tolerance (e.g., Klujeff, 2012) is seen different in a public sphere perspective depending on its democratic value. Some groups' communication might this way be more defendable and legitimate than others theoretically. The 'intolerance' to differently situated people's voice in one space (which, in a dominated versus

dominating view, means the *emphasis on* under-represented and marginalized individuals, see Young, 2002) can, then, have beneficial contributions to society.[15] Recognizing this should, however, in Hauser's (1999) words, "not mean that anything goes" (p. 80). What matters to this definition, seen in the theories outlined above, is that their communication is concerned with the societal injustices and exclusion of the wider public they refer to, and that they do not operate or aim to forever remain *enclaves*. They aim towards the eradication of some societal injustice.

However, the matter of what is 'injustice' and 'exclusion' must be further contemplated. Counter-publics are in this thesis operationalized to include people and groups who *perceive* some unjust exclusion as grounds for their need to gather, to eradicate these exclusions (Aasen, 2000). This means that it becomes useful to distinguish between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' counter-publics (Wessler, 2018). While counter-publics are oftentimes created by, and oriented towards eradicating exclusion mechanisms and unjust structures in society at large, and thus carry emancipative *claims*, they are not necessarily emancipatory if/when reaching their aims. Some rather carries aims that, if fulfilled, would lead to a decline in democratic and egalitarian terms. Such counter-publics "aim at maintaining structures of domination and exclusion" (Wessler, 2018, p. 151). Although they aim to convince a larger public about injustice and the need for change

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[15] This echoes a point made in deliberative systems theory (see Mansbridge et al., 2012; Nærland & Engebretsen, 2023), which is not addressed in this thesis.

(Dicenzo et al., 2011), fulfilling their aims would not enable an expansion of rights in the long run (Fraser, 2010). Legitimate counter-publics, however, *aiming* for democratic and egalitarian advancements (Wessler, 2018) may on the other hand sometimes not succeed in overcoming or recognizing their own internal exclusion and marginalization mechanisms (Fraser, 1990/2010, p. 137). I thus term these different forms of counter-publics, rather than focusing on their (il)legitimacy, democratic and anti-democratic (Article 3).

This potential of the public sphere concept means that it can include acknowledgements that what is seen 'natural' and 'objective', or as proper ways to speak about or address issues, is socially constructed and contingent on contemporary common understandings. Society is made up by normative spaces and 'naturalized' social constructs, which impacts and shapes what problems are more easily conveyable. Power dynamics are continuously present in what Habermas (1992/1996) claims are potentially transformable dominant normative public spheres, and understandings are continuously fought over (Habermas, (1992/1996, p. 381). Similarly, the theoretical insights outlined above implies that a 'consensus' can never be fixed, or even fully ascertained. Scholars have alerted against how normative assumptions about how conversations should go about according to the deliberative tradition, for example in terms of aiming for consensus, can also be suppressive if forced on social life, as democratic societies have structural differences and inequalities (e.g., Mouffe, 2000a; Young, 2000; Ahlström-Vij, 2012). Power and dominating views impact which voices and issues are

represented in the public sphere, illustrating that the public sphere is a normative space. Counter-public emerge to address adhering exclusion mechanisms. They form outside of arenas commonly used by the citizenry at large. Resistance as participation form is in other words inherent to (re)constructing the internal dynamics of public spaces and what (can) happen there. As the literature review demonstrated, social media platforms have provided crucial tools and spaces to counter-publics' resistance.

3.3   Social media platforms' public spaces

Habermas (1989) presents the public sphere through a history of decline, outlining a lacking public sphere before an ideal type emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, followed by a situation of a declining public sphere. Instrumental rationality intruding into social life – beyond where it is useful, that is, in structuring social systems - is one major reason to why the ideal public sphere does not exist in modernity according to Habermas. Commercial interests play a vital role in the public sphere's decline in this narrative, including in mass media institutions. While Habermas (1992) has later been more nuanced in his formulations, the initial description of the decline of the public sphere describes people becoming consumers of commercially driven media, rather than active citizens, and a public deprived of any "social climate" for discussion (Habermas, 1989/1991, p. 151). In this narrative, power is again presented before the public as in feudal societies in late medieval

Europe, rather than being discussed, criticized, and held accountable. Habermas (1992) recognizes that the narrative of an active and reasoning political citizenry to a public of consumers overlooked complexity and social realities and developments. He continues, however, emphasizing the factuality of "the larger outline of the process of transformation" (p. 430) as he initially described, and the importance of impartiality in media and communication processes (Habermas, 1992/1996). For example, only without strong monetary or political influence can the media enable equal and free participation in discussions concerning common matters (Habermas, 1989/1991). The 'sluices' through which information and perspectives travel, how they are shaped (Dahlgren, 2005) and what they are influenced by, matters to whether and *which* discussions and issues are brought into actual political decision making (Gripsrud et al., 2010, p. xx). The media and its place and function in civil society can thus be intruded, colonized, or instrumentalized (e.g., Habermas, 1981/1984; 1989/1991).

Scholars have both before and after Habermas stressed an intrusion of commercial interests in social and democratic life (e.g., Williams, 1962; Dahlgren, 2005). In the realm of the media, Dahlgren (2005) has contended that "normative considerations" (p. 150) of the media that does not bring about "short-term profits" (p. 150) have been increasingly replaced by the rationales and goals of market forces. Media scholars have furthermore been worried about and investigated whether increased media market concentration leads to decreasing diversity of views, perspectives, and representations in publics (McQuail, 1992;

Sjøvaag, 2014; see also 2016; Van Aelst et al., 2016; Hendrickx & Ranaivoson, 2019). Scholars have also been concerned about inequality as result of media access as well as media content, for instance whether content favors capital interests, the wealthy, and privileged (Trappel, 2019), and, in the case of the internet in particular, highlighted labor and class exploitation (Fuchs, 2010).

Social media platforms are a continuation of the commercialization and privatization of the Internet (see e.g., Schiller, 1999; Andrejevic, 2011), and scholars have thus contended that technology again has been 'captured' (Moore & Tambini, 2018). As described in the literature review, social media function not just as public spaces, but as platforms in a larger platform economy, differing from the traditional pipeline businesses controlling linear production chains (van Alstyne et al., 2016). In many industries, such linear paths from production to consumption are replaced with the development of the platform economy (Parker et al., 2016). Examples include the news media industry and the cultural industry, which previously were "matchmakers" between audiences and advertisers (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282). While Facebook, too, initially followed a two-sided market structure (e.g., Brügger, 2015), it has developed into operating a multisided market structure – circumventing traditional gatekeepers[16], mediating between and connecting a variety of actors (Evans, 2003;

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[16] In this sense understood as what manages value transmission from producers to consumers, which thus includes media editors but also for example universities (e.g., Parker et al., 2016).

Evans and Schmalensee 2016; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2016) – as the other GAFAM-members (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Coyle (2018) compares the platform business model to traditional bazaars, as a well-known place where sellers and buyers meet each other for exchange. These 'sellers' and 'buyers' are furthermore pivotal producers of most of the content that is present on and distributed by platforms (Gillespie, 2018). While media publishers previously held strong positions in the audience-market, they play more subordinate roles to the large platform corporations, being potentially dispensable (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). While in two-sided markets, "the demand on each side tend to vanish if there is no demand on the other" (Evans, 2003, p. 195), there are more likely numerous other actors, both producers and consumers, available for platforms' "resource orchestration" (Van Alstyne et al., 2016, p. 5), upholding the transaction place in multi-sided markets. Information exchange provided by platforms has with technological developments become viable to more people, detached from time and place restrictions, fueling content production. Development of algorithmic coordination has furthermore facilitated eased and rapid 'matching' of actors (Coyle, 2018).

For platform providers, this has meant less costs to physical infrastructure and expansion, as well as, according to Van Alstyne and colleagues (2016), "the ability to capture, analyze, and exchange huge amounts of data that increase the platform's value to all" (p. 4). Platforms thus facilitate unprecedented connections and exchange, accommodating and sparking economic activity (Coyle, 2018). Furthermore, they do this

in a way where actors can have various roles and relationships, easily shifting or multitasking between producer and customer/consumer. The aggregation and translation of interactions stemming from these actors into data give prominent social media platforms further competitive edge (Van Alstyne et al., 2016). The multisided market structure operates and benefit from network effects, that is, the (in)direct effect to participants when more participants enter a network (e.g., Evans & Schmalensee, 2016; see also Coyle, 2018). Direct network effects emerge "when the benefits of network participation to a user depends on the number of other network users with whom they can interact" (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2016, p. 144), and indirect network effects "occur when different sides of a network can mutually benefit from the size and characteristics of the other side" (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2016, p. 144).

In Van Alstyne and colleagues' (2016) words: "the larger the network, the better the matches between supply and demand and the richer the data that can be used to find matches. Greater scale generates more value, which attract more participants, which creates more value" (p. 6). Engendering and benefitting from network effects is thus a principal strategy for social media platforms. Attracting and keeping users is inherent (Evans, 2003; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Social media users are not just matched to advertisers, but bring data traces and further increased analytical opportunities, which for example "help identify the very strategies through which attention can be fully harnessed" (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, they create a lot of the content, which advertising can be placed next to. Gaining many customers through

initially low priced or free entry and service has been a common business strategy to further attract other "non-benefited" (Evans, 2003, p. 196) actors' entry, which provides explicit revenue, boosting a platform's success due to network effects.

In this view, then, social media are "seller(s) of goods" (Wessler, 2018, p. 42). Buyers of such goods typically aim for economic growth, but may also aim for political success (Crilley & Gillespie, 2018). Through tracking and analyzing our traces and behaviors (Jensen & Helles, 2017), we become goods for surveillance and marketing (Ravetto-Biagioli, 2019). The power of technology companies such as Google and Facebook are consequently often discussed in terms of their unethical use of 'big data' (Andrejevic, 2013; Johnson, 2019), and in terms of how their profit rationales may invade social life (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The 'platform economy' can thus be understood as a backdrop to the principles steering how interactions and information are created, transmitted, and used on social media, further impacting how they provide participatory spaces.

The platform economy is, however, not an isolated or technologically determined phenomenon. Dahlgren (2005), for example, claims that a "neoliberal order" (p. 150) has shifted the power hierarchy beyond media institutions, as political institutions are increasingly deprived of their power to the advantage of private capital. Similarly, 40 years earlier, Williams (1962) advocated that not only were alternatives to current communication technologies needed, but alternative versions

of society at large. Society consisted of "property, production, and trade" (np.), rather than communications. Communication technologies were similarly developed as "new opportunity for trade" (Williams, 1962, np.), rather than an "expansion of men's powers to learn and to exchange ideas and experiences" (np.). These scholars thus point to social constructivist understandings of technology (e.g., Pinch & Bijker, 1984), as well as emphasize that the issue runs further than developers and owners of media technologies per se. The problem lies in the ways society follows corporate interests beyond the areas where they are beneficial. It follows corporate interests also in the areas where people participate as citizens. This is in other words echoed in but reaches further than the ways in which platforms impact traditional media production and distribution (e.g., Nielsen & Ganter, 2018).

This section has briefly introduced theories concerned with the relationship between commercialization and democracy, and how social media platforms are developed by and sustain a platform economy. This furthermore illustrates that when people participate on social media platforms, communication processes are instigated on two levels; the user-interface level available to users, and the back-end of the interface, where users' communication and behavior are processed and analyzed into data (Langlois & Elmer, 2013). Social media logics theory suggests that processes at this back-end level is taken for granted by many social media users, especially those aiming for an audience. Taking into consideration the influence that this back-end level has to participation is crucial if aiming to understand participation on social media platforms

(Langlois & Elmer, 2013). As the next section will further reflect, social media logics are currently shaped by and supportive of the development of a commercialized internet.

3.3.1 Social media logics

Social media are both transmitters and communicative spaces. As is also the case for mass media, certain principles steer how social media 'work' (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). Social media logics can be described as "the strategies, mechanisms, and economies underpinning" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 3) social medias' "dynamics", or "the processes, principles, and practices through which […] platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5).

The concept of 'media logic' (Altheide & Snow, 1979) was introduced as an analytical perspective that considered the role and centrality that the mass media had come to occupy in the late 70s. While the term 'media logic' today could be applied more broadly to capture that 'rules' of different media emerge, as illustrated by scholars now specifying *mass* media logic (Hermida & Mellado, 2020), it initially rose to describe the mass media's process when presenting and distributing information (Dahlgren, 1996). As this process entailed the many formats used by the media, such as how elements were put together and presentation style, it was proposed as a form of communication (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. ix). Later, Altheide (2014), described it as the ways in

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which the media distributed and "communicated information" (p. 22), and as particularly referring to "the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium" (p. 22). For example, television news outlets had an interest in creating a ceaseless flow of events (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 238). The way that topics were sometimes given attention, and other times not, followed how mass media needed to shift out themes to keep people's attention. Media logics can thus be seen as "rules of the game of particular media, meaning the specific norms, rules, and processes that drive how content is produced, information distributed, and various media are used" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4656).

Inherent to the theory of media logic is that it is taken for granted. Altheide and Snow (1979) described that the mass media's strategies and tactics had become so integrated into society's everyday functions that they became seen as 'objective' and 'natural'. Another central part of media logic as theorized by Altheide and Snow (1979) is that it gains traction outside of the place that prompts it (see also Eide, 2004). According to Altheide and Snow (1979, p. 238), media logics' influence was widespread, impacting every major institution: "Our thesis is quite clear: Social order is increasingly a mediated order, and any serious attempt to understand contemporary life cannot avoid this fact and its implications" (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. ix).

Media logics evolve as new media technologies develop (Dahlgren, 1996; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015;

2016). For example, news outlets must not just tailor to mass media logic today, but increasingly balance, strategize against, or "marry" (Anter, 2023, p. 13) social media logic. Social media logic is made by the features that shape the dynamics on social media platforms. It relies on a different set of strategies, while blending "with 'established' mass media logic, while adding new elements and transforming already existing mechanisms" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5). Klinger and Svensson (2015; 2018) distinguish three analytical dimensions of media logics that is useful to understand social media logics (or what they term "network media logic") in light of political, public communication: content production, distribution of information, and media use. According to the authors, drawing on news mass media logic (see Esser, 2013), three elements underlie each of these analytical dimensions, namely "the underlying ideals, the commercial imperatives, and the technological affordances" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4662).

When it comes to the *underlying ideals* of social media platforms, the authors trace these as evident in "common perceptions about how content should be produced, distributed and how media should be used – as an ideal type and with regard to public communication" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 27). Elsewhere, the authors name ideals as "constant updating, connectivity, and responsiveness" respectively (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4662). The *commercial imperatives* describe economic contexts surrounding production, distribution, and usage. This is reflected in incentives of users spending time and being engaged on social media. This may illustrate how social media logics assumes user

production and interaction, not similarly assumed in mass media circumstances. As discussed in the literature review, social media platforms' business models (Brügger, 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018) are based on utilizing the data users leave behind when using social media. People's behaviors, interactions, connections, updates, and productions are 'surveilled'. Lastly, *technological affordances* also shape the analytical dimensions of content production, distribution of information, and media use. Technological affordances are shaped as platform designers have created options based on what technology (is seen to) offer, and further, as they are appropriated by users. Leaning on Klinger and Svensson's understanding of social media logic and their presentation of such logics, through one figure and three tables (2015), I have summarized their dimensions of social media logic in Table 1:

Table 1: Summarizing table of Klinger and Svensson (2015)

	Production	Distribution	Media use
Ideal	User-generated content based on ideals of produsage, reflexivity, and personalization	Viral distribution to likeminded others	Sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and likeminded others
Commercial imperatives	Low organizational costs privileging business models around personal revelations	Business model depends on principles of connectivity and popularity	Business model depends on data mining, target advertising, and surveillance
Technology	Affordance for fragmented publics	Affordance for updating in peer networks	Affordance for interactive use in peer and interest-based networks

As seen in Table 1, distribution ideal is described by "viral distribution to likeminded others" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 31),

and media use ideal is described as "sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and likeminded others" (p. 33). Elsewhere, the authors explain more in-depth what they mean by "like-mindedness" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1248). Rather than claiming that individuals merely have experiences in like-minded spaces on social media, they use the term "like-mindedness" to distinguish social media users from mass media users. In their words: "networks of friends and connections at least tend to be more like-minded than subscribers to mass media texts" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1248). The extent to which a person's online circumstances are really 'like-minded' is not easily assumed, illustrated by literature that emphasize weak and strong ties (Lu & Hampton, 2017; Goyanes et al., 2021), and research contesting fears that serendipity is absent on social media (Bakshy et al., 2015; Bruns, 2019a).

However, an abundance of information online necessitates making choices about what is relevant, that is, what and who to connect to (by both user and platform) (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). In Gillespie's (2018) words, "Facebook itself is the result of this aggregate work of selection and moderation" (p. 196) done by algorithms after people have selected friends and indicated preferences. While the extent to which 'like-mindedness' actually exist on social media platforms is an empirical question, possibilities of connecting with friends and 'followers' on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, and people with similar (predicted) preferences on TikTok, may reflect that like-mindedness in this model can represent a (distribution) and a (usage)

ideal. Such possibilities ease information and communication surplus, especially when seen compared to mass media (see, for example, Bennett & Segeberg, 2012; Engesser et al., 2017).

Elements in this table can be further understood by employing Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) description of social media logics. They identify four inexhaustive and interdependent principles, or "grounding elements", of social media logic: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication. I will explain how these two works complement each other. First, I will outline each of these "grounding elements".

Programmability, in short, explains the steering of data traffic. As already outlined when speaking about the impact of technological possibilities on production, distribution and use (Klinger & Svensson, 2018), van Dijck and Poell (2013) describes that data traffic is steered by both users and platforms, including through its algorithms. Algorithms can be described as technologies of problem solving that identify *what* and *how* data should be used to solve a problem. They are put-in instructions. In Gillespie's (2014) words, algorithms are "encoded procedures for transforming input data into a desired output, based on specified calculations" (p. 1). Algorithms are programmed (their input), and produce an outcome, a way of solving a (constructed (Gillespie, 2014)) issue with the identified data (their output) (Kitchin, 2017). In between these processes, on social media platforms, estimations are done in "big data contexts" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4655). As

emphasized by Klinger and Svensson (2018), one should thus recognize that "algorithms are encoded with human intentions and that humans cannot anticipate all the ripple effects of their designs and doings" (p. 4667). Algorithms hence play parts in social media logic (rather than making social media logic obsolete, see Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4658).

Although data traffic is impacted by both users and platforms' algorithms (e.g., Simpson & Semaan, 2021), programmability explicitly describes the aim of social media to provide a "programmed flow" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 4) which keeps people engaged and present on the platform (Gillespie, 2018). However, programmability also dependent on the other principles, illustrating their interdependence (e.g., Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Social media platforms thus aim to acquire people's attention, as attention has become a commodity (Webster, 2014) – being inherent to third parties such as advertising and political campaigning. Williams (1974) argues that programmability, or 'programming', was also crucial to mass media such as television to keep the attention of audiences. Editorial decisions however underlie this kind of scheduled content programming. Williams' point is still valid in a social media landscape, where programmability is engendered by platforms to keep the attention (and thus presence) of users. The term "attention economy" describes the ways people's attention - the "most intrinsically limited and not replaceable" resource - has become 'goods' for harvest and transaction

(Goldhaber, 2006, p. 10). Scholars have hence emphasized that algorithms[17] used in social media platforms "operate as powerful intermediaries in the public sphere" (König, 2022, p. 1374) and "are akin to institutions that structure interactions and intervene into society by shaping what issues rise high on the agenda and thus what discourse revolves around" (König, 2022, p. 1374).

Another principle which can also be traced to mass media logic, is *popularity*, describing the assignment of weight to certain content or actors. To that end, it has been closely related to discussions about agenda setting (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Traditional media (newspapers, radio, television) needs to make editorial decisions about what to publish, and may influence what issues are deemed most relevant to consider in a public (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). They are "professional gatekeepers" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1246). The mass media choose "influential voices" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 6) and may thus give some voices more weight than others. In social media logic, popularity relies on both users and algorithms. According to Gillespie (2018) it is "one of the most fundamental metrics" (p. 201). The principle of popularity describes that users (in combination with the platform, through algorithms particularly) impact what content and which actors that are relevant and should be given weight. Social media platforms differ in their strategies for how to highlight certain content and actors (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). However, there are some general

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[17] See Klinger and Svensson (2018) for a more comprehensive discussion of how to understand algorithms as connected to media logics.

dynamics that can describe a certain social media logic that many social media platforms to some extent share when it comes to popularity. This lies in this "two-way traffic", where users' actions matter as indicators of what is relevant and interesting, and where algorithms give content and actors "different value" based on such clues or advertising (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 7). Content or profiles that has gained some traction, or showed signs of being highly visible, are amplified (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). This may be done in terms of "recommendations, cued-up videos" or trends (Gillespie, 2018, p. 201). According to van Dijck and Poell (2013), social media platforms "measure popularity at the same time and by the same means as it tries to influence or manipulate these rankings" (p. 7). Potential popularity-loops may be instigated. Popularity is closely related to social media platforms' business models, as it plays into the ways in which they may keep or acquire people's attention and engagement (Gillespie, 2018).

A third principle is *connectivity*. Connectivity describes the centrality and opportunities of connections to platforms and their users. As described in the previous section, social media platforms' reliance and engendering of network effects (e.g., Evans, 2003) boost their further position and profit. While connectivity can describe social media platforms (often stated) aims of connecting people and their communities for their social benefits (van Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018), it pinpoints how algorithms connect people to social media

platforms[18], to each other (to facilitate user satisfaction, finding relevant content and people), and connect people to advertisers, for economic aims (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 8). The incentives of social media platforms to forge connections between people underlies worries about information and perspectives being filtered in certain ways to certain people, and "deep personalization" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 9). On the other hand, the abilities to connect across geographical locations have also been praised by scholars recognizing the value this has brought to, for example, marginalized communities and social movements (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Social media platforms gain from giving users the ability to form their own connections, and from connecting users to relevant content and actors they did not choose themselves, as it can strengthen users' satisfaction with the platform. Platforms also gain from being able to give advertisers premade target groups based on users' practices and connections.

All of the outlined principles so far rely on *datafication* (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). In this thesis, datafication is meant to describe when "aspects of the world" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 9) are generated into quantifiable data, and will particularly relate to when social media platforms create (Gillespie, 2018) and collect data points from people's presence and activities on social media platforms (Haim et al., 2018). Datafication is necessary for programmability, popularity, and

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[18] Van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 9) also describes that connectivity covers the processes when users are connected to platforms and platforms are connected to platforms. Connectivity thus occasionally and potentially matters beyond intra-platform circumstances (e.g., BEREC, 2022).

connectivity, as it enables analytics (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). For example, connecting people and content is enabled by collecting, operationalizing, measuring, and further predicting user preferences and behaviors. The principle explains how social media platforms have their, in pre-internet terms, "audience analytics" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 10) integrated in their design. This includes the monitoring, registering, and the treatment of aspects such as social interactions as data. It enables, for example, making predictions about what might keep users on a platform, and what content may interest and engage certain users. The analytics that datafication enable "are new tools in the struggle to prioritize certain (corporate, public, or private) values over others" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 11). Human knowledge and communication are handled as data points, and are subjected to computation (Gillespie, 2014).

These elements can all be traced in, and enable further diving into, the table aggregated from Klinger & Svensson's (2015) work. As can be seen in Table 1, van Dijck and Poell's work have explicit and implicit overlaps to the social media logic dimensions as proposed by Klinger and Svensson (2015; see also 2016; 2018). Connectivity and popularity are for example explicitly mentioned in the commercial imperatives of distribution, while programmability implicitly runs through all elements ("ideals", "commercial imperatives", "technological affordances") of distribution. Research has suggested that people expect a programmed flow tailored to their preferences (Simpson & Semaan, 2020) suggesting programmability may be a distributive

ideal. This furthermore illustrates how elements of social media logics operate together. For example, connectivity and datafication are also inherent to how social media platforms handle and utilize people's interactions and behaviors to connect them to each other and specific content; to personalization (e.g., Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Commercial imperatives are, furthermore, inherent to pre-internet programming and social media's programmability (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The technology of social media platforms also enables the distribution mechanisms required for programmability. Lastly, datafication can be traced in the commercial imperatives of media use. For instance, "data mining" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 33) in the commercial imperatives of media use necessitates datafication (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The two sets of authors acknowledge that the distinguished aspects in their social media logic frameworks must be understood as constructed for analytical purposes.[19] They are "mutually enforcing" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 3). Distinguishing elements are, however, useful to see how they converge, are entangled, and, potentially, matter to participation.

A great part of social media logic thus entails the content distribution process (Klinger & Svensson, 2018; see also Gillespie, 2018). Distribution is in this sense seen as the transmission of certain content to people's content feeds or to 'recommended'-features, from

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[19] And Klinger and Svensson (2015) emphasizes that their dimensions "applies only to political, public communication" (p. 28) as ordinary users may not have similar intentions, engaging in personal communication. They do, however, discuss how the principles afford and invite certain actions by social media users.

users-to-user, from advertiser-to-user, and occasionally from the platform company-to-users, done by platforms (Gillespie, 2018). Popularity, for example, is closely related to what Klinger and Svensson (2014) identify as the building blocks of distribution, namely virality (see Klinger & Svensson, 2014 for a discussion about this ideal versus the reach of most content). According to Klinger (2013), social media logics are "*built on* the logic of virality" (p. 722, my emphasis). Nahon and colleagues (2011) have identified the logic of virality as "a network-enhanced word of mouth" or "the process which gives any information item the maximum exposure, relative to the potential audience, over a short duration, distributed by many nodes" (p. 1). An inherent feature, and expression, of social media logics is popularly known as "going viral" (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019, p. 47). As social media impact how information and communication travel on their platforms, they shape communicative arenas. An aggregation of mechanisms becomes visible to users (especially) through their content feeds (Gillespie, 2018). People's participation is thus not just shaped in negotiation with the action possibilities social media platforms enable, but in negotiation with such platforms' mechanisms for handling content. According to Gillespie (2018) this shaping of communicative space especially happens through moderation ("removal, filtering, suspension" (p. 207)), recommendation ("news feeds, trending lists, personalized suggestions" (pp. 207-208)), and curation ("featured content, front-page offerings" (p. 208)). Through these paths, social media platforms "tune the unexpected participation of users, to produce the 'right' feed for each user, the 'right'

social exchanges, the 'right' kind of community" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 208).

There is in other words a close relationship between social media platforms' logics, and their role as arenas and distributors. This is also due to how people respond to social media logics, for example prompting practices such as "rage baiting" (Chen, 2022) where creators carve their messages to generate attention (likes, views, comments or shares) by provoking people (e.g., Gillespie, 2018), either supporting or strongly disagreeing with the creator (see also Ihlebæk & Holter, 2021 on how anger can be connected to fear). Prompting other's feelings may encourage sharing of the content in question, in turn considered central to social media logics (e.g., Hurcombe et al., 2021). Scholars have contended that certain patterns of consumptions and distribution of content follow social media logics, which can be seen in user-generated personal content, people's sharing of, engagement with, and discussion of a wide range of news (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). While people's role in shaping social media practices and upholding social media logics are often acknowledged (e.g., Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2022), there is a lack of research about how this unfolds, and specifically – whether and how people negotiate social media logics. The findings presented in this thesis suggest that this requires further scrutiny, as it presents a missing link in how we understand people's participation on social media platforms. Whether and how technology influence people and their practices represent a contested topic. The next section discusses some theorists' take on the influence of social media to people's perceptions

and practices, and the debate between social constructivism and technological determinism.

3.3.2 Perspective abundance and epistemic unease

One of the questions that arise when it comes to the role that social media platforms play in terms of influencing participation in the public sphere is whether social media platforms merely provide tools for static practices and perceptions, or whether they also impact and shape practices in and perceptions of the public sphere. Scholars have for instance suggested that social media platforms contribute to a mobilization of epistemic unease (Harsin, 2018; Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). The term "private publics" (Papacharissi, 2014) (Section 3.2.3) furthermore represents a theoretical concept that has evolved in response to such questions. In the following, I will briefly describe some theoretical reflections about the role of the internet and social media platforms to perceptions about (a 'crisis' in) facts and truth.

Different factors have been proposed to explain seeming confusion about, or apathy towards, what is accurate and true. Such explanatory factors include contemporary information abundance, distrust in traditional 'truth-tellers' (e.g., Giddens, 1990; Inglehart, 1997), such as journalists and scientists (Wynne, 2006; Carlson, 2020), as well as strategic information campaigns for political and economic purposes (Harsin, 2018). According to Harsin (2018), reality representations are 'everywhere', especially due to social media

platforms, where reality is oftentimes framed in specific ways for increased attention, prompting "confusion and suspicion" (p. 3) about many kinds of "'popular' conceptions of reality" (p. 3). Confusion and suspicion about truth claims can for instance be traced in alternative political parties and actors' successful mobilization of 'subjective' or 'felt' notions of truth as rhetorical device (van Zoonen, 2012). However, scholars have also emphasized that a part of such epistemic unease is *perceived*. Shifts in power relations and challenges to a previously steadier social hierarchy of truth telling has contributed to perceptions that a shared truth 'no longer' exists (Harsin, 2018; Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). However, discussions and contestation about truth is not new. Harsin (2018) for instance points to the enlightenment and the Marxist tradition, where those in power are criticized as the establishers of hegemonic truth.

The notion that a shared truth does not exist may first and foremost be a new phenomenon to those who have traditionally had the power and privilege to tell and 'fit within' 'the truth' (cf. McClintock, 1995; Barrios, 2017; Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). Marginalized individuals and groups have historically had their truth questioned (e.g., Fraser, 1990/2010). They typically haven't been recognized as 'truth-tellers'. Recognitions of this fact is reflected in criticisms towards the deliberative tradition for not sufficiently taking power into account. The tradition has been considered not just to overlook, but to facilitate how dominating views, behaviors, and systems are easily naturalized and reproduced (Mouffe, 1999; Dahlberg, 2007), thus undermining its own

ideals of equal access to and voice in public conversations. Not all spaces that are relevant to the democratic conversation have been for all (Jensen, 2007).

Support for the relevance of this criticism can be found in studies and theories suggesting that people are likely to follow and reproduce the majority viewpoint (e.g., Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Gigone & Hastie, 1993). When marginalized individuals gain legitimacy in the public sphere, for example witnessed through a rise in liberal and egalitarian progress in terms of legal reforms and social policies (Engebretsen, 2022), previous notions of truth are, depending on the extent of the transformation such reforms and policies require, disrupted (Kandiyoti, 2016). Public *attention to* 'post-truth' may thus furthermore prompt concerns and uncertainties (Harsin, 2018). As social media also allow everyone to create and (re)publish content, actors out to take advantage of, or people out to seek alternative facts due to, such concerns and uncertainties, may further distribute inaccurate information. This may, in turn, contribute to both the sense and actuality of increasing uncertainty to what is true. Banet-Weiser and Higgins (2023) suggest that while who is eligible to tell the truth has always been constructed and silenced certain perspectives, there may be a "new hypermediation of public truth struggles, especially online; and growing anxieties about the unstable status of 'facts' in public life, captured by proliferating discourses of 'post-truth'" (np.). Social media platforms' distributive logics and facilitation of quick dissemination of multiple perspectives may bring a heightened attention to multiple perspectives, in turn creating

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conversations, confusions, clarifications, or perceived disturbances about what is true[20].

An assumption in this thesis is that social media platforms do not merely provide transmitters and arenas for traditional public sphere engagements but that they *can* also impact and shape public sphere practices and perceptions. It rests on a conviction that the most useful notion in this regard is one that captures both (Lane et al., 2022). That is, a notion that does not just acknowledge how people utilize technology to perform tasks that they have performed before the technology in question became available. It also acknowledges the ways in which media technology (shaped by humans) can influence people's participation and public sphere engagements (in combination with people's utilization of technology).

This tension has classically been positioned between theorizations of technologies as either socially constructed, and people's agency in constructing, molding, and steering technologies (Pinch & Bijker 1984; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999), or theorizations of technologies as greatly impacting, or even steering, societal change and people's lives (Mcluhan, 1964; Postman, 1985). The latter, technological

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[20] The concept of "post-truth" is disputed (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023). I will not repeat or engage in discussions and criticisms of the concept "post-truth" (see Harsin, 2018 for a more comprehensive discussion). In this thesis, I am interested in one aspect that it touches upon, namely, an interest in truth, materializing in public discussions and advocacies about what is true.

determinism, is today echoed in discussions about how the power of artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems with access to immense amount of data (e.g., Karppi & Crawford, 2015; Coleman, 2019), may get out of human control (e.g., Winner, 1977). At the other end is the social constructivist perspective, arguing that people, and thus social change and orders, build and steer these technologies (Pinch & Bijker 1984; Servaes, 2014). Scholars have criticized the binary opposition between these two positions, where technology is either steering or not steering social change (e.g., de la Cruz Paragas & Lin, 2016). Neff, for example, expressed in a dialogue with Jordan, McVeigh-Schultz and Gillespie, that in debunking overtly deterministic views on technology and its impact on society, scholars "may have 'overcorrected'" (Neff et al., 2012, p. 301), as "there are times and places when and where we are not fully in control of our machinescapes" (Neff et al., 2012, p. 312). Technological determinism similarly comes in many versions (see, for example, Gunkel, 2003; Wyatt, 2008), some of which have attempted to nuance the discussion about the influential role of technology through rejecting the dichotomy between technological determinism and social constructivism (de la Cruz & Lin, 2016). Whether humans dictate or shape technologies, or whether technologies dictate and shape humans, represent a notoriously difficult topic, illustrated in these longstanding debates (e.g., Servaes, 2014). In Leo Marx' words: "If we are ambivalent about the effects of technology in general it is because, for one thing, it is so difficult to be clear about the consequences of particular kinds of technical innovation" (1994, p. 11-12).

While this thesis does not engage in this debate, or claims to say anything about large societal transformations, the research here employs a social constructivist view to inquire into participation on social media platforms. This is for instance invited, as this chapter has outlined, through the capitalist-cultural backdrop of social media logics. Social constructivism thus serves to highlight that the 'rules' for how social media 'works' (Klinger & Svensson, 2018), are not inevitable or 'natural', determined merely by technology (e.g., Gillespie, 2014). Social media logics and its supporting algorithms are initiated and impacted by humans, although they may be taken for granted and seem to live a life of their own.

3.4 Summary

The deliberative tradition has been criticized for not taking power into account – and thus for enabling the (re)construction and (re)naturalization of domination and exclusion. Critics tend to point out the tradition's unrealistic ideals, responses to which have defended the deliberative model as a critical tool that in fact highlights what critics claim it disregards. According to such responses, the deliberative model rather call attention to the ever-present political and economic self-interest in democracies (see, for example, Scudder, 2023). Defenders thus tend to emphasize that the deliberative democratic framework's normative core enables scholars to criticize and clarify the undemocratic results of inequality in communication processes. Habermas' framework

is in other words still seen as valuable in understanding public life and investigating the limitations and possibilities in contemporary democracies (e.g., Calhoun, 1992; Fraser, 1990/2010). But there is nuance to the theory. As I have argued in this chapter, participation is multifaceted. While expressions of participation such as resistance, orientation, and conversation do not follow strict deliberative principles, they still have a place within a public sphere framework, as they emphasize citizens' connection to and engagement in the public. Furthermore, concerns about the effects of commercialization on social and democratic life continue, not least through the platform economy, which materializes in social media logics. Here, the topic of technological influence is informed by discussions about epistemic unease and within the dichotomy of technological determinism and social constructivism. As social media logics contribute to shape spaces that people use for socialization, information gathering, and public connection, questions remain as to how participation may be influenced by such logics. In Chapter 5 I discuss what the findings from this thesis may tell us about the interplay between people's use of social media and its structural dimensions – operationalized here as social media logics. First, the next chapter outlines the methods and research design employed for this purpose.

4   Methods

In this thesis, I ask how participation may be influenced by social media logics. The articles are used to inform this research question, each having one sub-research question designed to capture one distinct area of participation (conversation, orientation, and resistance). This thesis relies on qualitative research methods to answer the research question, using thematic analysis of comments in comment sections, thematic analysis of interviews, and a digital ethnography of content feed developments on TikTok. These methods are used to grasp how conversations about public issues unfold on Instagram, how people perceive and use social media, and how counter-publics may be supported and materialize. The rationale behind the qualitative approach will be reflected throughout the following sections, starting with the research design, and the place of sensitizing concepts. Then, I will elaborate on key choices and strategies employed in each study, not given sufficient attention in each article. I will then describe what kind of knowledge this thesis produces, namely further understanding of the relationship between social media logics and participation, before discussing how an exploratory qualitative approach can be beneficial to tackle ethical research challenges. Lastly, I describe the thesis' epistemological and ontological assumptions, researcher positionality, and limitations.

4.1 The research design

The main research question of this thesis is: 'How do social media logics influence participation on social media platforms?'. This question has been approached through studies tackling conversation, orientation, and resistance, through content analyses of comment sections, interviews, and an exploratory digital ethnography. The sub-research questions guiding these studies are:

- 'What rhetorical genres are used when participants are engaged in conversations about public issues on Instagram?' (Article 1)
- 'How do social media natives use social media as social and public spaces?' (Article 2)
- 'Do TikTok's personalization algorithms support the construction of counter-publics, and if so, how may such publics materialize in its personalized content feed?' (Article 3).

These research questions reflect how I have used an exploratory design to combine different data and methods in order to investigate participation as phenomenon from different angles, using different perspectives (Grønmo, 2016). As the literature review and theoretical framework reveals, the findings from the sub-studies do not relate to the same kind, or the same level of, participation. Rather, I have mobilized isolated sets of data to "address different aspects" of participation (Gerring, 2017, p. 19). The different data sets I have mobilized for this purpose are: (1) Comments in comment sections, (2) Qualitative

interviews, and (3) Content feed developments. I have operationalized sub-questions to provide noncomparable observations. The studies are analyzed separately to first inform the sub-research questions, before together informing the main research question. In other words, I mobilize the sub-studies to inform one phenomenon (participation) from different angles by drawing on findings from these separate sub-studies, each relying on different kinds of data (Yin, 2018), rather than triangulating data to answer one question, at one 'level' of participation. To that end, the studies come together by informing the main research question, albeit through different paths. This PhD thesis mobilizes a mix of inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning. As will be shown in the following sections, each study has its own analytical process and reasoning, while abductive reasoning is employed at the level of sensitizing concepts in the thesis to answer the main research question. Sensitizing concepts, I will show, invite abductive reasoning. While the sub-studies all relate to one phenomenon (participation), it is their findings and conclusions, relating to different theoretical aspects (the sensitizing concepts), that I mobilize to inform the main research question. This structure secures the different nuances that these different avenues enable (e.g., Patton, 2002; see also Livingstone, 1991).

4.2   The sensitizing concepts

As I outlined in the theory chapter, 'participation' includes various aspects and practices. It has no precise or fixed characteristic that can

directly, in its entirety, be located empirically (Patton, 1990). Many of the concepts we employ in our day to day lives are "sensitizing in nature" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7), in the sense that we cannot go directly to their empirical presence or distinguish what they encompass in definite terms. In this rationale, I initially started the work on this thesis from sensitizing concepts (Blumer (1954)[21], as theoretical backgrounds to the phenomenon of participation, which in relation with data was intended to inform the research question. Blumer (1954) argues that employing sensitizing concepts in research allows for the investigation of phenomena that does not have a given empirical reference that allows for "clean-cut identification" (p. 7) of its empirical instance, while providing guiding tools for such exploration. Sensitizing concepts have, furthermore, commonly been employed as flexible and exploratory approaches to inquire into the relationship between the empirical, the theoretical, and previous research (Granbom et al., 2014). As such, using sensitizing concepts invites an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022), in that they allow for a back-and-forth process between theoretical assumptions and empirical revelations. To that end, scholars have utilized sensitizing concepts for their sensitivity to what a researcher finds empirically (Beeman, 1995). In Blumer's (1954) words, sensitizing concepts *sensitize* the researcher to fill "out a new situation" or pick "one's way in an unknown terrain", and "to make the inference from the concrete expression of the instance" (p. 8).

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[21] Scholars have commonly used sensitizing concepts for interpretative and guiding purposes in qualitative studies (e.g., Bowen, 2006; Granbom et al., 2014).

In this thesis, the three sensitizing concepts conversation, orientation, and resistance have provided entry points to understand 'participation' through different avenues (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). I have let them emerge through my encounter with earlier research, theory, and this thesis' findings. Each sub-study relates to one sensitizing concept, employed in the overall analysis rather than being highlighted and mobilized explicitly in each article. Accordingly, each article has its own within-study mobilization of analytical approaches, as their analyses do not relate directly to sensitizing concepts (employed in this thesis), but to their respective research questions (see 4.3.1, 4.3.2, and 4.3.3). The studies mobilize abduction (study 1), inductive analysis before looking to established theory (study 2), and combine deduction with an exploratory method (study 3).

As I employed sensitizing concepts as analytical tools in the early stages of this research (albeit without calling them sensitizing), I eventually came closer to understand their usefulness to understand the data as the analytical process evolved. As result, concepts were not established in the initial research design as they now appear. Initially, I was working with the concepts agenda setting, conversation, and protesting, and attempted to locate data that could inform these concepts (Patton, 2002). For example, departing from earlier research and theory, I assumed that the concept 'conversation' could be informed by (1) comment section analyses and (2) interviews. The interviewees, however, elaborated about orientation and private discussions as inherent to their participation on social media, rather than first and foremost

informing a participatory concept of conversation. An 'indigenous' (Patton, 1990; Beeman, 1995) meaning of 'participation' thus emerged as I spoke to the respondents in Study 2. Looking to theory about participatory practices similar to those described by the interviewees, I mobilized the sensitizing concept of 'orientation' to better understand these findings, while 'conversation' remained informed by my comment section analyses. Findings in other words invited another sensitizing concept, more adept at understanding the findings as distinct forms of participation (e.g., Bowen, 2019).

The sensitizing concepts thus allowed a process where I could move back and forth between theory and data, and where data was allowed to challenge initial assumptions. My sensitizing concepts where in other words molded as the research process went along. Theoretical assumptions, set out by earlier theory and research, can be brought closer to the empirical by allowing such restructuing and updating of concepts (Blumer, 1954). As will be elaborated about later in this chapter, I also took advantage of the exploratory nature of sensitizing concepts when it came to Study 3 as I decided to change its material as this thesis evolved. As Beeman (1995) explains, sensitizing concepts are valuable as they can "guide the analysis without overly restricting the gathering of data" (p. 100). The research design has thus allowed me to remain open and adaptive to unforseen developments and breaches of expectations (Vassenden, 2018), in line with the rationale of the employment of sensitizing concepts. At the same time, as I selected sensitizing concepts

from previous literature and theory, the findings of this thesis engage in a "cumulative generation of knowledge" (Granbom et al., 2014, p. 15).

While reflecting specific kinds of participation, and thus an inexhaustive exploration, all three sub-studies thus inform the phenomenon of participation. The sensitizing concepts simultaneously reflect the construction of participation as phenomenon, particularly as they merely represent certain chosen ways that participation may be understood. I thus explore concepts and phenomena in this thesis, rather than, for example, attempting to establish what variables impact a specific outcome, or claim definite representation of a concept (Blumer, 1954; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). I propose the sensitizing concepts as suggestive "gateways" to "the empirical world" (Blumer, 1954, p. 5). In line with the rationale of sensitzing concepts as I have explained above, I do not claim to contribute knowledge about all kinds of participation, or all forms of conversation, orientation, and resistance online. Although I have also let empirical revelations (my interpretation of the data) determine sensitizing concepts, rather than the opposite, the choices I have made about which sensitizing concepts shuld be used to approach and learn about participation are still of vital importance to the findings of this thesis. My choices omit other potential avenues that could inform 'participation', such as 'mobilization' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and 'voting' (Bowler & Donovan, 2003; Moon et al., 2006). Furthermore, as is the case for sensitizing concepts, some parts of the social world are investigated while others are left out when it comes to each sensitizing concept (e.g., Granbom et al., 2014; Bowen, 2019). The sensitizing

concept 'orientation' can, for instance, be explored by investigating the institutions, producers, or audiences of theaters (as could 'resistance', see Maslan, 2005). Similarly, 'conversation' can be explored and informed by looking more broadly at who speaks about news and politics online and why (e.g., Blank, 2017; Bestvater et al., 2022). Furthermore, 'resistance' can be understood as people's 'media resistance' for the purpose of democratic values (e.g., Syvertsen, 2017), while both 'conversation' and 'resistance' can be explored and informed by analyses of storytelling (e.g., Sium & Ritskes, 2013).

I thus argue that this thesis contributes insight to some ways that participation unfolds on social media platforms. Furthermore, as sensitizing concepts provide guidance to where the researcher may look (Beeman, 1995), they also guide a researcher's attention away from other aspects. A challenge to the research process is thus not being guided away from elements of the material that may also be relevant to the research objectives (Granbom et al., 2014), or to form prejudgments about the data (Bowen, 2019). I dealt with these challenges through continuously visiting theory and previous literature as the research process progressed, while utilizing the exploratory and flexible approach to the data that sensitizing concepts enable. The final section of this chapter will delve more into the topic of researcher positionality. Next, I will describe the rationales and processes behind the sampling of data, and the methods and conduction of each study.

4.3 Methods

I focus on depth rather than breadth in all sub-studies. The different studies use qualitative textual content analysis, in-depth interviewing, and digital ethnography, fit to mapping and characterizing tendencies in the data with regards to the research questions, i.e. conducting descriptive research (Articles 1 and 2), and for exploration to learn about something not yet sufficiently investigated (Article 3). Methods are chosen in an attempt to let "the problem under investigation properly dictates [sic] the methods of investigation" (Trow, 1957, p. 33), while having to take into account practicality (resources available) and ethical considerations. In the case of Study 3, I chose digital ethnography as method to investigate resistance due to sampling difficulties and the topic under scrutiny (counter-public formations vis a vis personalization algorithms). Initially, I mobilized comment section analysis and interviews to inquire into participatory practices, by looking at media content as well as media usage, as potentially "complementary and mutually challenging, each provoking the other to face neglected problems" (Livingstone, 1991, p. 288). I argue that when inquiring into participation, one can benefit from these different types of methods (Trow, 1957), as participation occasionally happen in public conversations (Article 1), but cannot merely be traced in visible interactions (Article 2), or be understood as taking place in the general public (Article 3).

In Section 4.2, I described how this thesis started in a slightly different place from where it ended up, both design-wise and empirically.

Cook and colleagues (1985) explain that when attempting to represent or inform concepts through empirical data, one is best off choosing "instances of a construct that past validity studies, conventional practice, individual intuition, or consultation with critically minded persons suggest offer the closest correspondence to the construct of interest" (pp. 163-164). My choices of data were throughout the research process based on previous research, theory, as well as consultation with my supervisors. The data was chosen in an exploratory purposive sampling rationale, in line with the sensitizing concept rationale. As the phenomenon of interest in this thesis particularly require sensitizing concepts (as opposed to, for example, researching phenomena such as specific communities or organizations do, see Patton, 2002, p. 238; Coyne, 1997), the "population of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 238) is not in itself clear and predetermined. Purposive sampling is known as a valuable sampling method when attempting to effectively capture appropriate information with regards to the aims of each research question (Campbell et al., 2020). Patton (2002) asserts that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 230). Relying on this sampling rationale, I chose data that I assumed would particularly shed light on what I attempted to study. There are many ways in which to proceed when purposefully selecting data. In this thesis, I have employed what Patton (2002) terms theory-based sampling, as well as a rationale similar to the "confirming and disconfirming case sampling"-approach (p. 237-239) for the data representing resistance. While theory-based sampling is considered a

useful strategy for sampling if the goal is to locate empirical manifestations of theoretical constructs of one's research interest, to "elaborate and examine the constructs" (Patton, 2002, p. 243), the 'confirming and disconfirming sampling' strategy enables exploring and giving depth to 'emerging patterns' that have appeared in previous research or in one's own exploratory research process (Patton, 1990).

Using these sampling strategies thus fit with my mobilization of sensitizing concepts as explained above. As has already been illustrated, however, locating empirical manifestations is always to be considered an attempt, especially when it comes to sensitizing concepts. When searching for and finding data, researchers should keep an orientation to the data's *potential* to inform theoretical constructs, rather than claim their univocal and 'true' representation. The following sections provide elaborations about the conduction of such sampling strategies, and why methods were chosen and how they were used, beyond what is already described in each article.

4.3.1 Content analysis of comment sections

Content analysis has been described as a research method that enables researchers to analyze text in systematic ways, and in light of its context (Krippendorff, 2013). I used content analysis for its value in giving insight into how public conversations may play out on Instagram. I used thematic analysis and a back-and-forth approach between data and theory for this purpose, aiming for an exploratory approach to the

comments. This approach enables detecting tendencies in the material without creating a predetermined coding scheme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). The analytical stages will be outlined below. First, I will explain the sample selection process (see also Article 1). As mentioned, this relied on a theory-based sampling rationale. I aimed to locate empirical manifestations of 'conversation', to inquire into this phenomenon on social media (Patton, 2002).

I identified two public figures[22] whose posts could provide comment sections looking for two criteria: topic and popularity. The first criterion, topic, meant that influencers chosen had to address public matters. A public matter was considered addressed as long as the creator framed an issue as a problem that was relevant to society's conversations and solving (e.g., Young, 2002). Thus, an interpretitive process already started at the stage of data collection, reflecting how the separation between sampling and analysis stages are often not clear in qualitative research (Mayer, 2015). The second criterion, popularity, was approached by looking at number of followers on Instagram. The website 'webstagram' was used for this purpose, a website which listed the most followed Norwegian Instagram profiles at the time (early 2019). I selected the 20 top accounts from this list, as an exploratory point of departure. From this list, the two individuals that most often fit the topic criterion was selected. Looking for a third individual from this list, with the topic-criterion in mind, was difficult as it severely impacted the

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[22] See '4.5 Ethical considerations'

popularity criterion (as this third individual only had a couple of hundred followers). The selection process for the comment sections are further described in Article 1.

4.3.1.1 Coding, analysis, and interpretation

I started the coding process by ordering the material to gain a descriptive and tentative overview of comments. This initial phase yielded patterns in the data such as the amount of afforded interactive tags (like hashtag and @s), emotional indicative signs seen in the use of emoticons (for instance, 'face-affection' emoticons such as 'face with tears of joy', see emoji_categories-overall.png), and longer comments discussing the issue being addressed in the post. What immediately stood out, was a high amount of '@-ings'[23], but a low amount of verbal discussion. Making up 51.6% (2456) of the comments, the amount of "@-ings" stood out compared to only 15.4% (734) of the total amount of comments being instances of actual conversations on a public issue (predominantly) using verbal means. Almost 60% of the comments containing an "@" did not have any additional information other than an occasional emoji

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[23] As a feature commonly provided by social media, the '@-ing' enables communication between people, by notifying and/or showing to each other. For instance, when using the '@'-symbol followed by a person's username as part of a comment in a comment section, the person 'owning' that username receives a notification that enables them to go directly into the comment section to the place where that comment is located. It thus enables responses, creating or continuing conversations by notifying others. To that end, it differs from sending the post (of which the comment section is attached) to people in a more private and closed space (such as in their 'dm', short for direct message, on Instagram), and from 'sharing' it (consequently making it a part of the content featured in the space connected to one's own personal profile).

or one or two words (1395), thus not entailing much visible conversation. Seeing this along with the difference between the large amount of likes to the posts (296327) compared to total amount of comments (4760), it indicated a high level of engagement with the post (in terms of making others aware of the post, and 'liking' the post) out of reach for me as a researcher aiming to evaluate the characteristics and features of the engagements as they manifested in visible comments in the comment sections.[24] I employed this kind of analysis of the comments in an attempt to create categories as close to the material as possible at this stage. For example, the initial coding for descriptive and overview purposes had prompted a category termed 'affective'. Many of the comments in the 400-comment pool fit into this category. At one stage, this category was opened, depicting sub-categories such as 'embarrassment' and 'laughter'. As analysis hence started evolving at this stage, I employed theory and previous research, going back and forth between this and the data (Timmermanns & Tavory, 2022).

I had expectations going into this analysis that were shaped by previous research. For instance, looking at the material in the very first stages of the study, my mind went to previous research finding epideictic rhetoric in Scandinavian online discussions about public matters (Andersen, 2020). Furthermore, although I expected that the comments would not fit neatly into deliberative ideals (due to an extensive body of

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[24] The largest amount of engagement was hence not accessible to me when merely approaching the comment sections. This engagement became clearer throughout the study's interviews and is discussed in Article 2.

previous research on online conversations), I had some expectations that they could be somewhat measured from them. That is, that deliberative ideals could be used as measurement tools (e.g., Wessler & Rinke, 2014). During the analysis of the comments, however, I experienced frustration that my expectations and the research it relied upon could not fully grasp what was going on in the comment sections. There was, in other words, a breach in expectations, prompting me to find other explanations for what I was seeing, inherent to (and a productive force of) the abductive strategy (Vassenden, 2018; Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). An abductive back-and-forth strategy, while continuing (re)coding, eventually led me to mobilize classical rhetorical genres as theoretical lenses, as two of them particularly helped clarifying categories. Literature about the characteristics of these two rhetorical genres helped understand the material further. They, through their characteristics traced in categories, were identified as overarching "repeated patterns" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86) across the data, that captured important aspects with regards to the research aim. While the comments could be understood through the central themes, supporting the handling of them as one case, an overview of nuances, similarities and differences between comment sections was obtained in NVivo.

4.3.2 Interviews

The research method of interviewing is described as fruitful to understand social experiences that may not be easily grasped through

merely, for example, observe people's behavior or interactions (Lamont & Swindler, 2014). In this project, interviews were seen cruical to grasp social media usage beyond what is visible online. Through interviews, one can gain insight into experiences, understandings, and practices across and within social media platforms (e.g., Theocharis et al., 2022). In-depth and semi-structured interviews can enable revising and altering assumptions, and develop more fully one's understanding of different aspects in close cooperation with respondents. In this section, I will leave out everything mentioned in Article 2, and rather elaborate about aspects that are not described there.

4.3.2.1 The Interview Guide and Process

The qualitative semi-structured interview allows for flexibility and exploration, which is what made the method so beneficial to the research aims of this study. I was interested in the relevance of social media platforms to interviewees' daily lives, how they used and perceived social media platforms, and what they emphasized when speaking about these matters. The semi-structured interview method was deemed most appropriate for these purposes. This method enabled letting interviewees' perspectives and emphases steer the conversations, while (re)orienting the conversation towards broad topics important to the research aim. The interview guide was in other words used as a conversation tool. It was not created to achieve a standardization of the interview process, but to guide the focus to the broad topics of social

media usage and perceptions, while prompting and inviting "'rambling' or going off at tangents" (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). The ways in which interviews are conducted thus matter greatly to this flexibility; the interview guide is merely its tool (Bryman, 2012). Hermanowicz (2002) illustrates the intimate nature of individuals' meaning making and the need for cautiousness and attentiveness when aiming to get close to them. Exact ways for how, when, and in what ways one should communicate with an informant is always a constant evaluation. Unstructured interviews are often fruitful to spark an interview more "similar in character to a conversation" (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). I aimed towards creating a conversation together with the interviewees. Although I probably (and occasionally definitely) did not succeed in fully facilitating an interview which imitated a normal conversation, I believe the *aim towards conducting conversations* is valuable in this attempt.

The guide was created in a 'broad' to a 'narrow' scope structure (see Bryman, 2012). I thus started the interviews by asking easy 'broad' questions. This stage entails 'easy questions' with broad relevance to the research aim. From this point, I let interviewees steer the order of questions, when relevant (some interviewees were more reluctant to 'rambling' at this early stage than others). That is, rather than asking questions consequetively as written in the guide. Interviewees were followed, rather than the structure, before circling back to sections overlooked for the purpose of following the interviewee, in those cases. This meant that I occasionally also asked questions depending on the interviewees' answers and elaborations, not included in the interview

guide. These narrow scope questions included my curiosity and the relevance their answers had to my research interests. I often also delved into narrow topics aiming for the interviewees' meaning and perceptions. Oftentimes, I 'talked back' the interviewees' answers as I had understood them, using different wording, asking whether I had understood them correctly. I did not only do this so that interviewees could "challenge or confirm" (Bryman, 2012, p. 478) my understanding, but to get interviewees to elaborate or give me more information. I learned that this particularly opened to valuable nuances, and more elaboration, from the interviewees.

Photo elicitation technique was employed in the later stages of each interview for the same purposes (e.g., Harper, 2002; Vassenden & Andersson, 2010). Photo elicitation technique stimulates "interviewees to engage visually with familiar settings and objects" that "may help them to think about things that they take for granted in different ways" (Bryman, 2012, p. 480). This can be valuable in opening the conversation to new, contradictory, or more revealing information. Photo elicitation technique was deemed a valuable method as it enabled stimulating informants' elaborations about their own practices and evaluations, as they drew on their previous experiences and perceptions of what they regarded as similar situations or content as shown in the images. In addition to images, smartphones were also occasionally used for

elicitation purposes (Kaufmann, 2018).[25] When deemed necessary, that is, in the cases where interviewees provided little elaborations, or said that they could not remember or was not sure about something, the interviewees were invited to use their own smartphone while speaking about certain matters (such as their own Instagram use). This has been shown to be a valuable tool to orient interviews to online practices, bringing forth memories, and also to 'break the ice' and formality naturally leading from the interview situation (Kaufmann, 2018; Newton & Southerton, 2023). The note function on my personal smartphone was used when talking about emoticons in the end of the interviews.

I conducted the interviews as closely as I could to the processes explained above. These plans and structures, however, did not mean that all interviews went according to plan. As I had decided to transcribe the interviews early on in the process, I was able to detect and learn from mistakes early on in the process, such as missing opportunities to ask follow-up questions when interviewees for instance implicitly touched upon relevant aspects with regards to the research question. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the planned conduction of interviews. The last 5 interviews were thus conducted digitally, using the online video platform Zoom. This method has shown to be both beneficial and challenging to the qualitative interview setting (e.g., Oliffe et al., 2021). Meeting digitally, instead of in-person, can enable the convenience,

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[25] Although not through smartphone log data or with personalization in mind (e.g., Kaufmann, 2018). I never looked 'over their shoulder' when they used their own smartphone for ethical purposes.

comfort, and safety of being in one's own home, enabling disclosure. Simultaneously, it can challenge the detection of an interviewees' "facial emotions and micro-expressions" (Oliffe et al., 2021, p. 5), be difficult for attaining "reciprocated gaze" (p. 5), and give the interview a "staccato"-like character, impacting "the flow of the conversation" (p. 5). The latter was occasionally noticeable in my interviews. Despite a mostly stable internet connection, interruptions and attempts not to interrupt each other was present, illustrating our mediated interaction, impacted by lag times (Oliffe et al., 2021). In some cases, this made the attempt to create a 'conversation'-like interview, with room for elaborations and going off at tangents more demanding. In other cases, reorienting the conversation into topics of interest to the research was more challenging. This may reflect that the challenges and benefits of online interviews not just depend on the interviewer and their strategies to alleviate challenges (such as pausing extra before and after speaking). They also depend on the person being interviewed, and their background, experiences, and feelings around the digital interview setting.

4.3.2.2 Coding, analysis, and interpretation

After interviews were transcribed, documents with numbers replacing interviewees' names (see below, 'Ethical considerations'), were transferred to the qualitative analysis software NVivo for coding and analysis. I had made notes throughout the interviews, after interviews, and during transcribing interviews, which together enabled identifying

topics that I was especially interested in exploring further at this analysis stage. There is no singular and specified procedure for how to do thematic analysis. Since particular aspects of the conversations intrigued me, as they seemed very relevant to my research interest, and were reoccurring in and across interviews, I wanted my analysis to provide an in-depth analysis of certain parts of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Employing this method means that some topics and parts of conversations were overlooked in the analysis stage. In my study, this meant that, for instance, conversations about ordinary people's (lack of) authenticity on social media were overlooked. While this is a valuable topic to scholarly inquiry, it was – in line with thematic analysis procedures (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) – not a theme that I considered crucial with regards to my overall research aim, considering participation through the lens of usage and perceptions of social media.

I was in other words interested in certain topics and had already spent much time being close to the material before transferring transcripts to NVivo (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process confirmed the prevalence and relevance of some of these topics, while enabling detailing out the different aspects of them and carving out new ones of particular relevance to my research question. As is outlined in Article 2, the interviewees explained an avoidance to participate visibly, in front of others, something previous research emphasizing social context collapse has witnessed and theorized (e.g., boyd, 2008). I witnessed the avoidance already in stages before reaching the NVivo stage but were not yet at a stage where I could identify specifically what

this avoidance entailed or was directed towards. The coding process of creating, changing, merging, and clarifying categories, enabled identifying suggestive core elements of this avoidance, what the interviewees gave as reasons for it, and their negotiations of (in)appropriate behaviors and (in)acceptable 'visibility', as well as its extent and boundaries. This stage also enabled identifying more closely crucial aspects in their active utilization of social media platforms. Through analyzing the transcripts, I ended up with themes that covered important aspects of their participation (as relevant to my research question), and from that point on I dived further into what the interviewees said within these themes. From there, I identified main themes as outlined in Article 2. I believe this process enabled meeting some of the challenges that exist when using coding (software) as process for the interpretation of qualitative interviews, that is, losing the larger context in which things are said (Bryman, 2012).

This interpretative process reflects an inductive analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that inductive analysis does not "try to fit" the analysis "into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p. 83). Although the themes I identified were not separated from my research interest, they did not stem from any specific theory or pre-existing coding frame. Furthermore, they had little in common with the questions asked in the interviews, typical to an inductive approach within thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the same time, I focused on specific aspects of the data, rather than providing a rich description of the data as a whole, a typical trait of a

more deductive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). While data was not put into predetermined codes - as typical to a deductive method - the process did, then, share some similarities with the "theoretical" thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) contrast to deduction. Theory was also applied after identifying themes, to understand them further, thus combining inductive and deductive reasoning (e.g., Ferrer-Conill, 2018). I did not "inductively generate theory" (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003, p. 384), but proposed an updated concept to an already established theoretical concept. The research process is thus best described as a deep dive into selected aspects of the data, moving from description to interpretation, "where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The study's early stages are best described as inductive, recognizing that induction can hardly be employed in a 'vacuum' (e.g., Burawoy, 2009), while its findings were interpreted by established theory, placing the latter stages of the study in deductive reasoning.

4.3.3 Digital ethnography

The qualitative exploratory research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) allowed that I looked to TikTok for Study 3, as I witnessed its rise and popularity, especially with regards to its personalized content feed. While the research aim of article 3 was to investigate online counter-public formations from the outset, the focus on personalization

and the choice of the digital ethnographic method was seen appropriate as I experienced difficulties in the exploratory initial stages of the study. In a theory-based purposive sampling rationale (Patton, 2002), I initially chose hashtag sampling to locate data that could inform resistance as participation. Hashtag searches is a common method to navigate and sample content from social media (D'heer et al., 2017). Scholars have often relied on hashtag searches when investigating TikTok, illustrated in the figure below[26]:

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[26] This is an illustration based on a literature review I conducted with attention to aspects relevant to gain insight and understand methods and justifications when using TikTok material. In a google scholar search the 01.february 2022, using the keyword "TikTok", the search engine presented me with 1190 publications, of which the first 150 included 92 articles from peer-reviewed journals. Of these 92 articles, 52 used TikTok-content as data source. The figure presents the distribution of data types for these 52 articles. It can indicate what scholars, up until that time, tended to employ as grounds for their analyses when investigating TikTok.

Figure 2: Literature review results
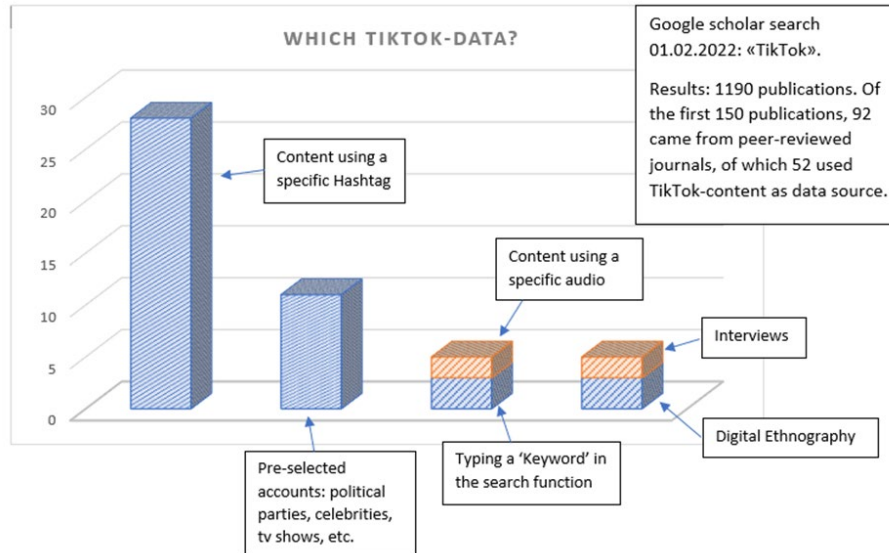
As I attempted to navigate the platform by using hashtag searches, I experienced the consequences of TikTok's strong personalization, and the challenges the platform may pose to TikTok-research that rely solely on this sampling strategy (see, for example, also Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2020; Shcellewald, 2021). After searching for hashtags, TikTok's result list consisted of many videos without the hashtag I had searched for. Seemingly, some additional mechanism also decided which videos were presented as results. Although I could not know what the result list was based on, the results represented a feature I had become interested in through the other studies, but which I had not been able to study in-depth, namely the algorithmic distributive system inherent to social media logics. The personalized distribution of TikTok was at the time popularly known to create different 'sides' on the

platform, that is, different spaces tailored to specific communities, which people were (often) appropriately 'placed in', in line with their life situation or interests. Given the aim of Article 3 – to investigate resistance as participation form, through counter-public formations – the distribution of TikTok, seemingly influenced by a focus to personalization, was seen as a highly relevant object to further investigate. As shown in the theory chapter, counter-public theory has often characterized counter-publics as somewhat 'personalized' spaces of marginalized groups.

The scarce research explicitly considering content feed developments as consequences of TikTok's strong personalization suggested that an explorative approach would be beneficial (e.g., Tjora, 2018). Research had furthermore demonstrated the value of investigating TikTok through employing a digital ethnographic approach (Newton & Southerton, 2021), as it can contribute to elucidate the intricacies of communication cultures and the range of expressions proliferating on the platform (Abidin, 2020; Schellewald, 2021). The ethnographic method represented a method sensitive to the outcomes of these hidden distributive mechanisms as they appeared on TikTok's content feed over time. Exploratory digital ethnography was for these reasons considered an appropriate tool, to experience the ways in which the communicative environment of TikTok changed (seen through the content feed) as I interacted with the space.

The research method ethnography is commonly described as oriented towards "creating detailed and in-depth descriptions and interpretations of people's everyday lives and social and cultural practices" (Lindgren, 2017, p. 258). Data collection happens through closely and for a considerable amount of time observing participants, often combined with in-depth interviews. This "contextualized research data" is then "closely described, read, and interpreted to carefully map out patterns of thinking and acting" (Lindgren, 2017, p. 258). In classic ethnography and anthropology, where the researcher is physically and geographically co-present next to individuals when and where interactions happen, context may be more easily grasped. In Study 3, I focused on the content being distributed to me on each account's content feed. The study's rationale was not to trace specific individuals or communities, but to investigate content feed developments in terms of which content were distributed to each profile, within each device (cf. Domingues et al., 2020).

To (aim to) grasp empirical manifestations of resistance as participation, while exploring the distributive mechanisms of TikTok, I thus let the data "emerge during fieldwork" (Patton, 2002, p. 240). The ethnographic method enabled exploring whether giving indication of preference to TikTok through hashtag searches, and then spending time watching content appearing on its content feed, were sufficient to reach data that enabled exploring resistance as participation. The process itself speaks to the relationship between users' participatory practices and social media logics. The "confirming and disconfirming case sampling"-

approach (Patton, 2002) enables confirming or disconfirming patterns, and importantly for my project, adding "richness" and "depth" (p. 178) to further understand assumptions about patterns and their relevance. Relying on a rationale similar to such a strategy, together with digital ethnography, thus enabled probing into whether and how 'sides' of TikTok occur (Abidin, 2020), and furthermore, whether these 'sides' were concentrated in a way that they supported acts of resistance as seen in counter-public formations. This enabled tracing whether, and if so how, TikTok's personalization supported resistance as participatory practice (in line with counter-public theory).

Although the research was exploratory for above-mentioned reasons, and the digital ethnographic approach was fruitful for the aims of the research, my departure from counter-public theory implies deductive reasoning. However, I had no pre-established categories when analyzing the material. This can be seen in the figure presented in Article 3. My analysis of the categories was, however, shaped by theories about counter-publics. The analytical stages did not stop at 'testing' theory (counter-public theory) or 'confirming' trends (content feed developments into 'sides'), but carved out two elements previously assumed together, namely, counter-public formation and algorithmic engendering of virality and visibility, proposing a new concept. I further theorized how this may support what has previously been detected by researchers: normalization of anti-democratic perspectives. The deductive reasoning stemming from my research question (as it entails a theoretical perspective), then, positions this study as deductive, while the

analytical process remained exploratory and open to generating theoretical concepts. For these reasons, this study represents a rare case of deductive ethnography, as ethnography usually assumes inductive approaches (Tjora, 2018). At the same time, the exploratory approach enabled me to go beyond the counter-public theoretical framework, to see the data in light of other theories and research.

The overall exploratory design of the thesis thus enabled choosing "the most appropriate data collection technique based on the question being asked" (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 166) as well as the theoretical framework chosen. This study is thus best described as an exploratory digital ethnography that is also very much steered by me as a researcher. I take on a role as a social media user experiencing and co-shaping the performances of fluctuating communication environments. The structures dealing with people's engagement as data traces to base future communication, sent back to the user's content feed, upon, pertains to any other individual, relative to their amount of engagement (Jensen & Helles, 2017). It has become known for shaping any individual's communicative experience on the platform (for example illustrated in conversations about which 'side' on TikTok a person is 'on', see Abidin, 2020). It was these mechanisms, and the outcomes as seen on the content feed, that was the aim of this study. The algorithmically curated content feed pertains to the experience of all users of TikTok, and its personalization *mechanisms* are thus relevant to any other participant, even as each such participant might have different experiences consequently due to this structure, depending on their

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actions and contexts. As will be described in the section about researcher positionality, my data selection however greatly influences the findings in all the sub-studies.

4.3.3.1   Data collection

Fieldnotes were first transferred from a handwritten notebook to an excel sheet. Dates and time, as well as the sequence of accounts for each session, were also registered in this spreadsheet. The fieldnotes were then transferred to the qualitative analysis tool Nvivo. Screenshots and fieldnotes together enabled a strategy sensitive to the distribution logics of TikTok, with a quick turnover of an endless amount of content (think, for instance, about this content feed and the (more) limited content feed of Instagram relying largely on self-chosen social connections) and relatively short attention spans. As TikTok-videos are often as short as 15 seconds (Domingues et al., 2020), six hours of immersion a week meant that I could face up to around 1500 videos a week. As I created these fieldnotes and started sorting it for NVivo-transfer, I came closer and closer to the material, and eventually got a sense of potentially meaningful categories. A stage of developing, merging, separating, and merging categories were further started in NVivo directly after immersion ended, in July 2022. Anonymized screenshots were coded alongside these fieldnotes.

4.4 Knowledge production

I do not focus on effects or aim to find causal relationships through the three studies. They are not designed to determine quantifiable prevalence and distribution of different aspects in the material. The studies hence do not enable saying anything about to *what extent* social media logics influence participation on social media platforms in general. Similarly, they are not equipped to measure the degree or effects of the participation that is explored, or effects of social media logics to participation at large. The knowledge I produce in this thesis is rather oriented to enhance understandings of social media logics in a participatory light, and propose basis for future research (Guba, 1978; Mayer, 2015), through providing in-depth descriptions of the material (Gentikow, 2005).

I thus argue that the findings generate knowledge that transcend the material that is scrutinized (Danermark et al., 2002). While emphasizing that findings are identified by looking at the data from a particular standpoint, and that I play a crucial role in their identification and interpretation, I hence inevitable claim some form of generalization (e.g., Payne & Williams, 2005). However, the generalization that this thesis implies is different from an empiricist concept of generality, which generalizes findings from the smaller (researched) population to a larger (unresearched) population. I propose a type of generalization that is "without probability" (Gobo, 2008, p. 194), and that is not suggested as conclusive (e.g., Stake, 1978). Rather, it is similar to theoretical inference. The thesis implicitly argues generalizability "to theoretical propositions […] and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 2009, p. 15).

This should be evident throughout the articles, when I claim, for example, that the conversations in the comment sections, and the interviewees' elaborations, can tell us something about the communicative environment of social media platforms, and when I argue that they can be understood through the theoretical lens of social media logics. Similarly, it is implied when I argue that the findings of the digital ethnography can illuminate a gender essentialist continuum, as well as confirm a theoretical concept (hyperconnected publics), which, in turn, can be explained by looking to the theory of social media logics. In other words, I imply that the article's findings have some "general relevance beyond the local circumstances in which [they were] produced" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 86). This is particularly reflected in my suggestion of new or adapted concepts (Article 2 and 3) (e.g., Yin, 2009).

Hammersley (1992) emphasizes that problems arise when claiming that one's research is a kind of 'theoretical inference'. He problematizes three types of justifications typically used by ethnographers when claiming theoretical inference: (1) that the readers judge validity and relevance, (2) that results can falsify or support a universal law of human behavior, and (3) that what is studied represents an ideal type, which consequently can inform any type instances, regardless of how they may deviate (Hammersley, 1992, p. 91). The problems with these three types of justifications for theoretical inference, according to Hammersley, stems from their reliance on relativism or (fallacious) assumptions of conclusiveness. While leaning towards theoretical inference, the type of generalization implied in this thesis can

rather be understood as speculative (Williams, 2000), suggestive, or potential, while building on previous knowledge. This follows from the knowledge production properties of sensitizing concepts. They are non-conclusive and exploratory by nature. This continuous sensitivity to the empirical is fruitful as knowledge expressed in such "abstract concepts" (Danermark et al., 2002), such as 'orientation', is different from knowledge claims that can be proposed about more empirical categories such as 'children'. In other words, I *suggest* that there is a relationship between findings and larger structural aspects, and (through the theory of social media logics) untie these structural aspects from the instance in which they emerge through the findings (Danermark et al., 2002; Gobo, 2008). That is, I do not generalize the "individual case or event" itself (Gobo, 2008, p. 206). Gobo (2008) exemplifies this generalizability of structures from particular instances:

> While laying a page of a newspaper on the floor and declaring one's sovereignty over it (Goffman, 1961) is a behavior observed in one psychiatric clinic only, the need to have a private space and control over a territory has been reported many times, albeit in different forms. (p. 207)

This thesis does not claim to identify certain or conclusive structures, then, but is rather suggestive, aggregative (with regards to previous research and theory), and non-conclusive. The studies' contributions are discussed in each article, some of which will be further presented in the next chapter as it discusses findings and conclusions. In the following section, ethical considerations are discussed, before I

describe epistemological and ontological assumptions, followed by a brief discussion about reflexivity.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Given the exploratory and flexible approach I took to the research process, data collection procedures had to be updated for ethical screening as the research developed. Data collection procedures continuously approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) under case number 971869, before each sub-study was conducted. In the following, I will discuss some ethical challenges and considerations not touched upon in the articles.

4.5.1 The articles

Despite the comment sections' "public forum" (NESH, 2021) character, as is discussed in Article 1, I have not named the two creators of posts in this thesis, nor in the article, as it enables going directly to the comment sections and find participants, despite my rewriting of quotations in the relevant article. The topics discussed were occasionally very sensitive and personal, and additional measures were appropriate to ensure the anonymization of comment section participants. Naming the creators of posts would easily allow the identification of Instagram posts, given their description in Article 1, and further, the identification of participants engaging in conversation in the comment sections. Translating and

occasionally rewriting comments for the purpose of anonymization may not be enough in cases when the material is small (e.g., n = 400), and when the data selection process is closely described, illustrating the importance of assessing the context and specificities of a study when evaluating which ethical considerations are necessary.

For Study 2, audio files from the recording of the interviews were stored on a USB, and transcribed into anonymous documents, using numbers as pseudonyms, followed by deleting the audio-file. The USB, along with signed information and agreement forms, and interviewees' name, year of date, contact information, and identifying numbers, were stored in a double locked storage unit in my office. When interviewees used their smartphones, they did so without showing me their screen. The phones were merely used as a way for the informants to render their activities, use, and emphasized features and meanings of the space. This was deemed the most ethical approach as other people, which the interviewee might be interacting with, had not given their consent to be part of the research. For the use of my own device, the 'note'-function was used as a tool for talking about emojis. Within a note in this application, no other people or information is depicted.

In Study 3, no personal data was obtained in the process of transferring fieldnotes to an excel sheet, and then to NVivo. No (user)name was included in these notes unless I could decipher that the person depicted was an adult and that the creator aimed for a broad audience (for example, through the use of hashtags, e.g., Abidin, 2020).

Occasionally, these notes included direct quotes from a video. As this can be regarded as sensitive information, as it can potentially be traced back to the video in question, I limited the direct quotations in publication of the findings to those clearly coming from a video by or of a public figure in a clear public setting (such as an interview setting), that was also likely to be available on the internet in many forms (thus not directly connected to any singular user distributing the video of a public figure through their account, potentially including any personal information). While I did not retrieve any data from the platform, screenshots were occasionally grabbed to complement the field notes. The decision followed the ethical standards (adults, not in vulnerable situations, and aiming for a broad audience, e.g., NESH, 2019), and despite not aiming to use these screenshots in any publication, I anonymized them immediately after each session ended, before transferring the anonymized screenshots to NVivo. The anonymization included removing usernames, faces, and any bodily or textual potentially identifying features (for instance, tattoos, necklaces and bracelettes, and background details such as features inside someone's home). Article 3 outlines crucial limitations and ethical challenges of this study, one being the ethical challenge of viewing anti-egalitarian and harmful content on social media platforms for research purposes, thus engaging in its further virality and traction due to social media logics. Next, I will discuss how exploratory approaches to studying online conversations, experiences, and expressions, may enable ethically sensitive methods.

4.5.2 Exploratory methods meeting ethical challenges

The prominence of social media platforms to people's socialization, entertainment, and information gathering means that social media are often regarded as goldmines of data on people's behaviors and perspectives. The ethical gathering and handling of this kind of data by researchers has consequently been a central area, continuously under development. The previous sections (as well as the articles) outline some relevant ethical considerations when drawing data from social media. In this section, I will address how this thesis' research design enabled being sensitive to some ethical considerations and challenges.

The qualitative exploratory design allows for a continuous evaluation of whether different data types and methods are in line with ethical standards. For example, in this thesis, I could identify relevant Instagram comment sections for Article 1 through exploring whether comment sections reasonably met requirements of intended and expected publicness without consulting each potential comment section participant (Elgesem, 2015; NESH, 2019). Next to meeting criteria of popularity and topic, the creators of the posts were identified as providers of public forums (e.g., Elgesem, 2015) particularly as the creators' Instagram activities had been a topic of debate in Norwegian mass media. The digital ethnography employed in Article 3 furthermore enabled a constant evaluation of what data was ethically responsible to include in my fieldnotes and further analysis. The ethnographic method enabled

evaluating whether each creator was an adult intentionally reaching for publicity (through hashtag-use explicitly aiming for virality (such as #fyp)) that is, on a single case to case basis (see Abidin, 2020). As I could assess such matters while 'being in the field', I could also circumvent the potential issue of including information about people that are not necessarily covered by one's research aim and ethical considerations. For example, if collecting all posts from a hashtag search, one may automatically get additional information on who has liked the post in question, which may be sensitive information depending on what the post entails. While interviewees' responses made up the data in Article 2, and not social media data per se, the exploratory design was also fruitful with regards to ethical standards in this study. Rather than relying on a strict interview guide demanding answers to certain pre-selected questions, an exploratory approach consisting of a loose structure and broad questions attempted to give the interviewees' control with regards to the depth and sensitivity of the conversations[27]. This point was explicitly addressed before conversations started.

Ethical challenges still remain, however, also for this thesis' design. One is the lack of obtained consent from the participants in the comment sections (e.g., boyd & Crawford, 2012). While I have contended that the comment sections can be treated as public forums

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[27] Informed consent was obtained through an information sheet and consent form (see 7.2), as well as through an introductory face to face explanation about the interview and the interviewees' rights, such as the right to withdraw consent.

(e.g., NESH, 2019), I cannot know whether the participants perceived or intended that their comments were placed in a public space, available to others (cf. Abidin, 2020). A potentially even more crucial challenge of my design is that the comments that were collected for analysis might have been deleted from the comment section by a participant after my data collection, while remaining as part of the data corpus for analysis. To that end, there is a potential issue with satisfying one inherent element to the traditional standards of informed consent when using social media data where obtaining consent is otherwise deemed impossible (due to scale) and unnecessary (due to a sufficient public character) (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Participants should be able to withdraw consent. This issue is relevant to any social media research that obtains data from reasonably characterized public spaces without explicitly asking for consent and informing each person that (and how) consent can be withdrawn. This challenge would perhaps be possible to alleviate through greater cooperation and agreement between parties, in line with those sought by the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and the Code of Practice on Disinformation, in terms of transparency and data access from platform companies. While the latter aims to empower researchers in giving access to anonymized public content, its objectives to empower users does not include having options of non-compliance. The tensions between the research community and social media companies at large and in particular with regards to API policies will not be discussed in this thesis (e.g., Bruns, 2019b). An agreement in these respects would, nevertheless, likely require some

kind of marking of, or notification sent to the creator behind, any social media content that had been included in research, so that participants could be informed and withdraw their consent.

4.6   *Epistemological and ontological assumptions*

This thesis relies on a social constructivist perspective, entailing that it sees people's knowledge and understanding about the world as continuously (re)created and sustained through interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 2004). Individuals are impacted by, and impact, the context in which these interactions exist. People thus continuously (re)construct public conversations, and society develops in terms of dominating understandings and values. Social constructivist perspectives commonly guide research towards investigating the function and presence of a phenomena, as situated in a certain situation and certain contexts, rather than the phenomena's 'natural' way of being (that is, if even recognizing that phenomena have a 'natural' existence) (Egholm, 2014, p. 148). This orientation is thus inherently anti essentialist when it comes to the social world, contending that what we perceive as natural and obvious does not stem from phenomena's' inherent existence. Ontologically, a social constructivist perspective emphasizes that social life is continuously (re)constructed. Through continuing to perform certain practices, in certain ways, or speak about a matter as being of a certain type, thus having certain consequences (for example, accepting something as a matter of war, instead of as a crime, e.g., Gabrielsen, 2009; Wodak,

2001), people reconstruct practices and understandings, and often, take them for granted. In a nutshell, a social constructivist perspective ontologically embraces that social life is shaped through being reiterated. Similarly, knowledge about the world is created and sustained through social processes, where there is a continuous fight for definitions (Egholm, 2014; see also Paulsen, 2023). The way people agree to define the world matters greatly because it prompts how we act and react in the social world. The *importance* of this making of existence, and not a phenomena's essential properties, is what is emphasized in this thesis. This does not necessitate that this thesis' ontological stance is that reality is nonexistent beyond these conceptualizations. It merely emphasizes (and is mainly interested in) that social reality is (in addition) continuously constructed. It is through human construction that many phenomena exist, and through human construction that phenomena can be known and experienced. Epistemologically, then, this thesis assumes that it is through our construction of concepts, practices, and understandings that we can gain knowledge about the world and social reality. It assumes that knowledge is always situated.

Although best being placed under a social constructivist umbrella, this thesis furthermore draws insights from pragmatism and postmodernism. The pragmatical influence stems from the effort to approach the research question from specific angles, thus juggling mixed perspectives to gain insight (Saunders et al., 2019). This recognizes that the world can be interpreted and researched from many different perspectives, which will give different answers and results, and which

isolated cannot give a complete picture of reality. Postmodernism is relevant to this thesis as it touches upon how power relations and taken for granted ways of speaking and acting dominate and regulate. This perspective typically allows for and highlights marginalized voices. Social relations and power dynamics are historically and culturally defined, through routines and interpretations, which in turn shape and are internalized in the social world (Egholm, 2014). This perspective is particularly relevant to this thesis as it enables clarifying how truth and societal recognition are not stable or given (Article 2 and Article 3).

The overall perspective of this thesis thus lies in a social constructivist standpoint which posits that "reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities, in other words reality is constructed intersubjectively" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 137). However, this thesis distinguishes itself from research that *probes into* the actual constructions and 'making of existence'. It does not, for instance, *analyze* discourse and power relationships. Social constructivist approaches oftentimes aim to identify, explain, or denaturalize normative assumptions. While I engage with normative theories in this thesis, I do not scrutinize norms or aims to identify their existence (beyond recognizing their mentioned traces in Norwegian reports and practices), as has been common valuable efforts that have bridged normative theory and social constructivism earlier (e.g., Price, 2008).

As the theory chapter illustrates, I do not simply deduct theoretical assumptions, but engage with and criticize them through a social constructivist perspective. It is deemed valuable to evaluate participation through lenses of normative theories, especially since these theories have considerable influence on Norwegian society seen in the constitution and in national reports (Kalleberg, 2016; NOU 2022: 9), and social media have been criticized through these lenses (Ingram & Bar-Tura, 2014; Chambers & Gastil, 2021). The taken for grantedness of Habermasian deliberative ideals as can for example be traced in the Norwegian constitution invites a social constructivist understanding when inquiring into participation on social media platforms. In Price's (2008) words, social constructivism can inform "normative approaches by providing more rigorous grounds for key considerations" (p. 194) such as whether "normative positions are implicitly underwritten by empirical assumptions" (p. 194) and can help "identifying otherwise neglected issues for normative assessment" (p. 194). It can also situate findings vis a vis theory and pinpoint potential normative struggles or implications, and potentially guide policy makers or regulators. Employing this approach is thus an attempt to recognize how normative theory may carry values and assumptions about reality – such as the (certain) democratic effect of an alleged attainment of 'consensus' (e.g., Kohn, 2000) - in ways that are also constructed, and that may veil, for example, exclusion or power. This is for instance illustrated in this thesis' emphasis on the potential for change, for example, in *what* issues society emphasizes (i.e. 'what are problems'), how people understand

matters (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 2004), including whether matters are regarded as better placed and handled in the private or in the public.

Rather than delving into how people reconstruct knowledge about the world, their understanding of concepts or phenomena, it approaches the avenues through which (re)constructions take place, through people's participation. In Article 1, the social constructivist perspective helps situating and understanding the comment sections as examples of conversations where public matters are molded and negotiated, and attempting to contextualize them in a broader public sphere framework (a *deliberative democratic* framework), while the normative theoretical assumptions from *democratic deliberation* theory (Chambers, 2009) describes their assumed failures. In Article 2, the social constructivist perspective enables identifying the interviewees' taken for granted views of social media logics, appropriateness, and consequently, their own actions, while emphasizing their negotiated responses to these circumstances. In Article 3, it helps to describe the proliferation of and dynamics between anti-democratic and democratic counter-publics. The social constructivist perspective also enables this thesis to approach the studies under one umbrella of social media logics, recognizing social media logics' construction and influence. Social media logics highlights structural conditions for participation on social media platforms.

The epistemological and ontological orientation as outlined above highlights that concepts and theories can never fully represent

reality. The theories I employ are rather means to further understand social reality, and the concepts I lean on, and develop, are attempts to label certain things that I have interpreted as having relevance to the research. The public sphere for instance, is approached as a theoretical concept which cannot be found as an external empirical entity (but which can help evaluate and more closely understand participation beyond institutionalized settings), and which empirical traces are always shaped by established, often taken for granted, 'truths' and (often hidden) power relations (Egholm, 2014). While doing this, I, however, I bring my own normative assumptions, which could also be scrutinized by a social constructivist approach. While on many occasions I am explicit about my employment of normative public sphere glasses, before illuminating normative struggles and insufficiencies (as in Article 1 and 2), I am not separated from my own normative assumptions. This speaks to researcher positionality, which I will briefly discuss in the following.

4.7   Researcher positionality

This thesis rest on a conception of reality and knowledge which treats social phenomena as created by both researchers and others through language, concepts, perceptions, and actions (Saunders et al., 2019). While holding on to this conception, I simultaneously indicate that researchers can somehow inquire into the social world. While this thesis does not aim to inquire into the actual *construction* of social phenomena, it does claim to provide further understanding and insight. The necessity

of attempting to be attentive to one's own position is pivotal to the possibility of providing such contributions. While this cannot secure impartiality or objectiveness, one should strive to be reflexive.

My experiences, perspectives, and social positioning may influence the research process and outcomes. Furthermore, as described by van der Walt (2020), the academic tradition and paradigm in which a researcher is positioned may furthermore have an impact, as well as the specific "theoretical (scientific) assumptions embodied in his or her respective theoretical traditions" (p. 65). The tools I 'think with' shapes and limits which 'frames' I put observations in and not, when I encounter certain traces or nuances in the material.

My positionality thus impacts the use of theories and concepts in this thesis. In other words, my theoretical background and knowledge likely shape what kind of findings are identified, and what kind of knowledge this thesis contributes (e.g., Vassenden, 2018). While I aim for transparency and credibility through arguing for why findings can be seen through certain theoretical lenses, my interpretation still has consequences for the kind of knowledge this thesis (does not) contribute, and possibly also the relevance and usefulness I give certain findings. The topic of this thesis itself sends a signal about a normative stance. Emphasizing participation and connection to the democratic conversation, implies a normative perspective (Benhabib, 1996), first, in contending that democracy is desirable (Christiano, 2018), second, in claiming that democracy encompasses more than its formal

institutionalized procedures. My theoretical framework furthermore implies that I adhere to ideals as those presented by the theory of deliberative democracy (as distinguished from theories of democratic deliberation, see Chambers, 2009), that is, that democratic decisions should be a result of conversations 1. by people that are affected by such decisions, and 2. where power does not dictate. This normative stance underlies this thesis motivation, topic, and design. While I highlight some normative assumptions, then (such as those prevalent in democratic deliberation theory (Chambers, 2009)) and emphases on participation *as* visible public partaking, I do not scrutinize the underlying normative stances of democracy, and specifically, participatory and communicative democracy, that shape this thesis as such. A subscription to the values of self-determination and equality is implied. These two principles can be traced in the negative and positive freedom conceptions, respectively, and complement each other in forming a liberal and social democratic concept. The normative assumptions about liberty and equality being desirable are for example uncritically employed when operationalizing a democratic and an anti-democratic counter-public in Article 3.

My operalization of 'participation' further draws boundaries in certain ways, and decides what is and what is not investigated in this thesis. While the focus on this concept implies that I assume that people's free expression, exchange, and gathering of information should be in place in order for the realization of proper self-determination (beyond formal voting procedures that collect numerical backing of already established options), my choice of which theoretical traditions to look at

when selecting sensitizing concepts is not given. Which areas of the social world are deemed relevant when inquiring into these sensitizing concepts are furthermore shaped by my decisions about where to look, and what previous research I find as result. Attempting to understanding findings through a particular theoretical framework, this thesis does not provide the only way of interpreting them. Furthermore, while qualitative exploratory research methods are usually very valuable in their flexibility and in-depth investigations, my subjectivity as researcher likely matter not just to what is being researched, but how the research is conducted, and how and which results appear and are interpreted (Mayer, 2015). For example, through the interviews I take on a role as co-producer of findings, and prober of questions. The exploratory, semi-structured, in-depth approach to the interviews also mean that no interview was similar. As result, findings may be hard to replicate, or even evaluate by others. Furthermore, I claim that the findings have relevance with regards to something (e.g., Geertz, 1979; Williams, 2000). As the social constructivist perspective makes clear, both 'relevance' and any 'something' is continuously constructed (while not seen as reducing the world of an actual ontological existence). Thus, when claiming that findings have relevance, the social constructivist perspective inherently puts the researcher in an appropriate and uncomfortable position.

My choice of what data might be useful to explore, in what ways, are also subjective evaluations. Other researchers would likely have chosen different data to represent the theoretical constructs, and thus

found different results. My involvement in the research does furthermore not stop at the stage of choosing data. I strongly contribute in shaping samples not only through selection (for example through data cleaning in the comment sections, or selecting the reqruitment process and criteria for interviewees), but also through production, particularly through digital ethnography and in the interviews. Furthermore, all else being equal, other researchers could have interpreted the data differently. In this thesis, I attempt to alleviate the challenges of my strong presence on the conduction and presentation of this research through transparency and documentation, explaining how and why certain data and methods are chosen, and the ways in which I identified and interpreted findings (Grønmo, 2016; Campbell et al., 2020). A critical awareness of how the data allows for certain findings, and overlook other aspects which also could be relevant to the questions this thesis tackle should in other words be maintained throughout reading this thesis. The results of this study, rather than being posed as facts that can be even proven true or false, are interpretative alternatives. Thus, they should be read as suggestive and indicative, rather than as hefty proclaiming.

4.8   Limitations

I have discussed the limitations of this thesis throughout this chapter, including limitations in the selection, production, and analysis of data (see section 4.7). Limitations are also addressed in each article. Overall, the empirical, theoretical, and methodological choices I have made, and

the interpretative process, naturally exclude other potential avenues to investigate how social media logics influence participation. The studies are, furthermore, not designed to measure degree or effect. While I have defended the knowledge that the studies produce, clear limitations do lie in their conclusive strenghts. Each article also has certain limitations when it comes to its specific data and methods. For example, Article 1 cannot say anything about who participates in the comment sections, why they choose to do so, or their take-aways from these discussions. The same goes for potential on-lookers of the videos that are investigated in Article 3. Conversations and expressions in these two studies are theorized by their 'footprint' on social media platforms. They lack insight into contextual factors. While articles 1 and 3 each have a section about these limitations, Article 2 does not. I will thererfore give the limitations in Article 2 some attention in the following.

For Article 2, the sampling procedure presents some limitations. The recruitment of interviewees was done by email (see appendix). Recruitment aimed for gender balance, but besides that, informants are only characterized by their age. Informants were recruited from a pool of sociology and media students at the BA level (Peterson & Merunka, 2014). Hence, their disciplinary affiliance and backgrounds, as well as the wording of the email, may have attracted interviewees that were particularly interested in the topic, who may have already formed perspectives and opinions about their social media usage. This may even have attracted individuals that were particularly attentive to datafication and algorithmic distribution. The email, as well as the information and

consent form (see appendix), may also have set the stage for certain kinds of viewpoints and answers given by the interviewees. However, the study does not aim for representativeness, but to explore how mechanisms that are relevant to all social media users (albeit not necessarily experienced in similar ways), may have an influence on participation.

The interview is also a special and 'unnatural' setting, which comes with certain limitations (Hermanowicz, 2002). Different questions, asked in different ways, or by someone else, might have produced different answers, which may have provided different insights[28]. As Berry (2002) remarks: "Interviewers must always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth" (p. 680). This 'truth' can both refer to how 'true' the answer of the respondent is, deliberatively, but also to how the respondent, unaware, might give certain answers on behalf of others – answers that might have been given in other circumstances (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010).

The limitations of this thesis thus stem from its small samples, what they may represent outside of what the articles can infer, as well as how these samples are used and interpreted. The overall research design overlooks a range of participation forms that could be relevant to understand how social media logics influence participation (see Section 4.2). While this represent a limitation of this thesis, it also provides

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[28] Similarly, having a recording device present may have impacted the interviewees' responses, representing the non-natural setting of the interview and recording of their responses for later analysis.

avenues for further studies into the relationship between social media logics and participation.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design for this thesis, and my choice of methods. I have given particular attention to the sensitizing concepts as tools employed in the overall analysis to understand findings from the three articles further. The sensitizing concepts were arrived at through visiting theory, reading previous literature, and by following their sensitizing rationale in remaining open to change based on what was found empirically. The data have in other words guided and tested their suitability, reflecting the flexibility and analytical value of sensitizing concepts. The analytic strategies behind each study, as well as their ethical challenges, have furthermore been placed within the exploratory qualitative approach. I have given particular attention to this thesis' epistemological and ontological assumption, resting on a social constructivist perspective and focusing on how social reality is continously reconstructed. This is employed when engaging in dialogue with some of the normative theories outlined in Chapter 3, and especially used to understand social media logics, as I inquire into their influence. At the same time, considering researcher positionality, I am not necessarily consistent in my emphasis on social construction of theoretical assumptions and concepts, as I for instance refrain from engaging in a critical discussion about normative assumptions about

democracy and participation. Transparency about the research process and theories employed are meant to alleviate the challenges of my strong presence on the conduction and presention of the research. This chapter, as well as Chapter 3, together describe how and why certain data and methods are chosen, and how I have placed them theoretically. I thus argue that results are interpretative and suggestive alternatives. Such knowledge may be built upon, scrutinized, and criticized, in joint scholarly aim towards increased understanding. The next chapter describes this thesis' findings, focusing on answering the overall research question.

5   Discussion

5.1   Introduction

This chapter brings together the findings to demonstrate how they contribute to answer the research question: How do social media logics influence participation on social media platforms? I have approached this research question through various avenues, each one representing one sensitizing concept of participation: orientation, conversation, and resistance. These sensitizing concepts have allowed an exploratory, theoretically informed yet empirically sensitive approach to participation on social media platforms (Blumer, 1954). The findings show that social media participation is influenced by social media logics through people's negotiation of these logics when participation on social media, avoiding, adapting to, or utilizing such logics. Social media platforms' architecture and logics, together with people's motivations and needs, form opportunities and limitations for different forms of participation. Sometimes, users' appropriation of social media logics (e.g., Article 1) are beneficial to their aims of visibility, virality, and distribution to 'appropriate' audiences (Article 3). Other times, users negotiate social media logics as they attempt to avoid some of its manifestations (Article 2).

Certain forms of participation are invited as people negotiate social media logics. Social media logics invite certain kinds of conversations, participation that is privately contained but publicly oriented, as well as reward certain attention-seeking actors, specifically

those who's messages entice emotions such as fear and anger. This is witnessed in the three articles through conversations where public and private matters are (re)constructed, where ontological contests of scarce reciprocity and moral positioning dominate (Article 1), private publics of community and public orientation (Article 2), and hyperconnected publics supporting resistance as participation (Article 3). Rather than presenting new or old participation forms, this thesis thus demonstrates how participation is reinvented (e.g., Bennett, 2012) on social media, in a negotiation with social media logics. The findings reflect that as people do not merely adapt to social media logics, assumptions about social media logics' relevance to people's participation needs to be further researched. This chapter will elaborate about these findings more in-depth.

5.2 *Negotiated participation*

The social media logics literature has previously been heavily influenced by perspectives from journalism and political communication, looking at whether and how actors seeking people's attention would adapt to or negotiate social media logics. Social media do not just work as communication and information transferring technologies where attention can be attained or given (as previous studies within social media logics often emphasize) but are also social and participatory spaces, where public and private expressions and conversations take place. Media logic has been referred to as "the assumptions and

processes for constructing messages within a particular medium" (Altheide, 2014, p. 22). The 'assumptions' and 'processes' that are social media logics must thus also be scrutinized through a participatory lens. This reaches beyond how audiences of attention-acquiring actors consume their messages and whether or not this is in line with social media logics (e.g., Shehata & Strömbäck, 2021). Although social media logics assume user production and interaction, and while theory of social media logics describes how social media's ideals, commercial imperatives, and technology *influence* how social media are used (Klinger & Svensson, 2016), there is scarce research on social media logics' influence on participation.

This thesis brings in participation. Findings suggest that people engage in negotiated participation as they enounter social media logics. The studies identify practices in conversations, orientations, and resistance that rely on, adapt to or are avoidant towards social media logics, suggesting that social media logics are interconnected with the role social media platforms play as communicative arenas. Findings thus demonstrate how people may variously adapt, avoid, or utilize social media logics, dependent on, for example, their motivations, needs, and perceptions of such logics. The below table illustrates these findings in relation to Table 1 presented in Chapter 3, synthesizing the work of Klinger & Svensson (2015). Table 2 illustrates that while social media logics may be taken for granted, as the theory suggests, they are not automatically incorporated and accepted into people's participatory practices:

Table 2: How social media logics influence participation

Participation on social media	*Dimensions of social media logics*	*Production*	*Distribution*	*Media use*
	Ideal	*User-generated content based on ideals of produsage, reflexivity, and personalization*	*Viral distribution to likeminded others*	*Sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and likeminded others*
Comments		Adaption		Adaption
Interviewees		Avoidance	Avoidance	Avoidance
Videos		Adaption	Utilization	Utilization
	Commercial imperatives	*Low organizational costs privileging business models around personal revelations*	*Business model depend on principles of connectivity and popularity*	*Business model depend on data mining, target advertising, and surveillance*
Comments		Adaption	Adaption	
Interviewees		Avoidance	Avoidance	Avoidance
Videos		Adaption	Utilization	
	Technology	*Affordance for fragmented publics*	*Affordance for updating in peer networks*	*Affordance for interactive use in peer and interest-based networks*
Comments			Utilization	Utilization
Interviewees			Avoidance	Avoidance
Videos		Utilization	Utilization	Utilization

Table 2 represents this thesis' findings in a simplified way. Findings are placed as either avoidance, adaption, or as utilization

towards social media logics. While avoidance represents opposition to social media logics, adaption and utilization distinguishes practices of adapting to social media logics, from those explicitly benefitting from using social media logics to gain an audience or attention. Fields are left blank where the study in question (indicated in the left column) cannot indicate anything about the relationship between the participatory practices it investigates and the social media logics' characteristics in question. Findings are thus simplified in this table, being presented as either complete 'avoidance', complete 'utilization', or complete 'adaption'. As such, there is more to the findings than what is indicated by such simplified representations. For example, Article 2 shows that people may be avoidant to different parts of social media logics, and that this avoidance presents itself with different intensities. The interviewees, for example, stayed active on social media platforms, supporting the commercial imperatives of media use and distribution as inherent to social media logics, and shared information among friends (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), however in closed-off groups. Furthermore, Article 1 illustrates that comment section participants *occasionally* and *partly* may adhere to social media logics' media use ideal of "sharing reflexive and personal information among peers and like-minded others" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 33). That is, while some of them shared personal information, others merely posted a tag of another person's username. According to responses from the interviewees, such comments may rather be a way to circumvent this media use ideal for public interactions. The findings should thus be read as representing *some* aspects of

participation, illustrating a few contingent ways in which the relationship between social media logics and participation unfolds. It also represents an update of the research on social media logics, illustrating how people may negotiate social media logics when participating on social media platforms through adapting to, avoiding, or utilizing such logics. To that end, findings also suggest how people outside of political communication do not necessarily follow outlined dimensions of social media logics (Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

The findings represented in the table indicate that there are tensions between social media logics and normative assumptions about participation. Given the theory outlined in Chapter 3, it seems reasonable to expect that participation does not follow normative assumptions. These expectations come, for example, from the gap between empirical reality and ideals. Previous research as presented in Chapter 2 support the expectations that participation does not follow normative assumptions. Normative assumptions about participation oftentimes break down when transferred to social media platforms. While explanatory factors undoubtedly lie in the idealistic notion that these normative assumptions carry, this thesis demonstrates the role of social media logics to the tensions between normative assumptions about participation and social media platforms. On the one hand, findings write themselves into a long line of studies recognizing that social media platforms are not the public sphere arenas optimistic visionaries hoped they could be. They are not revitalizing the public sphere. Rather, some of the findings of this thesis suggest the opposite. The exploratory

ethnography demonstrates that TikTok can support the distribution of anti-democratic protesting and ideologies (Article 3) of anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal views (Ging, 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Engebretsen, 2022). Its logics may particularly suit actors whose rhetoric and engagement depends on the facilitation of rage and fear (further discussed below). Furthermore, the interviews reveal that interviewees do not see social media platforms as appropriate arenas for active and visible public participation (Article 2). Finally, the conversations found in Instagram's comment sections linger at a stage of clashing truths and moral positioning, largely lacking reciprocity (Article 1).

On the other hand, the studies undertaken in this thesis do find evidence that social media platforms are used for participation that can be conducive to individuals and society. Article 3 demonstrates that democratic counter-public formations may also benefit from social media logics, and Article 1 and 2 may be seen in a different light if they are relieved of the normative assumptions about participation typically related to the deliberative democratic tradition. Social media platforms are used for informal conversations that typically are located at the 'underlying' level of (traditionally considered) political conversations (Kjeldsen, 2016; 2018), where (re)constructions of public matters are dealt with (Fraser, 1990/2010) (Article 1). Social media are also used for spectating, gathering information, learning, and sharing and discussing in private (Article 2). To that end, the studies support longstanding advocacies for recognizing public sphere conversations and engagements beyond what is typically considered formal or "political

talk" about already established public matters, and beyond reciprocal public partaking in discussions (Benhabib, 1996; Hauser, 1999; Fraser, 1990/2010; Young, 2000; Mouffe, 2000a; Wodak, 2001; Habermas, 2006; Nærland, 2014; Vatnøy, 2017; Kjeldsen, 2016; 2018; Moe, 2020).

In the following, I will relate these findings through the lens of social media logics. Emphasizing how participation is negotiated vis a vis social media logics, by people conducting different participatory practices, the relationship between social media logics and participation directs "our attention to the way in which the communicative spaces relevant for democracy are broadly configured" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 149). This thesis also demonstrates how research can benefit from a multifaceted concept of participation when the aim is to gain insight into this relationship. In the following sections, I describe how participation moves through various stages - molded by avoidance, to utilization, and lastly, to adaption to social media logics. This description illustrates how the sensitizing concepts have been used in this thesis, from orientation, to resistance, and lastly, to conversation. I will then connect these findings, through the lens of double articulations, and discuss how they can illustrate the tension between social media logics' economic backdrop and deliberative democratic ideals. Lastly, I summarize this thesis' findings and suggest avenues for future research.

5.3 Avoidance of social media logics: Private publics of community and orientation

Social media logics influence participation when people experience and perceive them as constituting unwanted and uncertain mechanisms. This plays into their avoidant practices in ways that suggest social media logics theories need to look beyond attention-seeking actors (cf. Jacobs & Spierings, 2019; Haim et al., 2021; Anter, 2023). Social media logics may contribute to engender participation forms of public orientation also while actors partake only in private (e.g., Swart et al., 2018; Kalogeropoulos, 2021). Hence, orientation is central to such participatory practices. Individualized public orientation, however, challenges the very concept of participation (discussed below).

Research on social media logics have been particularly interested in how institutions or actors aim to get people's attention, seen in the range of studies investigating how social media logics impact journalism and political parties/actors. Haim and colleagues (2021) for example suggest that van Dijck and Poell's (2013) contribution represent "tipping points of social media adaption" (p. 408). They suggest that "norms, strategies, mechanisms, and economies will form" (p. 408) around programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication. My findings suggest that the tension between social media logics and people's participation is more multifaceted as not all people aim for an audience.

Social media logics assume interaction and user-production (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). This differs from the more receptive

practices assumed by mass media logic. The interviewees of Study 2, however, largely refrain from interacting or producing content publicly. Hence, people may participate on social media while being avoidant towards experienced or perceived effects of interactions becoming objects of "datafication", steered by social media's "programmability" logic, and potentially, their "popularity" logic (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). At the same time, while we learn how young people may negotiate the underlying ideals and commercial imperatives of production, distribution, and (an openness in) media use from this study, they also use the technological abilities of interaction with "likeminded others" – in private (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4657). The interviewees rely on the action possibilities of the platform to interact with peers out of sight of others, and their activities provide fuel to social media logics. Their activities hence enable datafication, connectivity, programmability, and popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

As people can contribute to network effects, indicate preference and provide data without explicit interaction and expression (e.g., Van Alstyne et al., 2016; Weimann & Masri, 2023; Schellewald, 2021), their participation does not have to 'form around' social media logics (Haim et al., 2021), for the datafication and utilization of their behavior, presence, and actions. While people may resist social media logics, they may thus still help sustain them.

Taken together, these negotiations mold into participation that resists public visibility, and that values privateness. Such negotiations

were partly born from the commonly shared characteristics of social media platforms: social media logics. Hence, users are in negotiations with social media logics – allowing them in some instances, denying them in others. Findings thus inform Klinger and Svensson's (2018) point that: "How we relate to media is governed by the logics/combination of logics on media platforms in terms of rules and processes of media production, distribution, and usage, as well as our perception of such norms and processes" (p. 4665). Rather than taking for granted the influence of social media logics on participation, scholarship needs to examine this further, to understand what these differences entail across settings.

As social media logics are opaquely shaped by profit-incentives, a perspective that may, at first sight, seem relevant is Habermas' (1989/1991) contention that economic influence in communication processes prevents a functioning public sphere of free and equal participation. Previous research has characterized social media platforms as inherently undemocratic due to their commercial imperatives and operations (e.g., Fuchs, 2021). Here, "protected speech required for communicative action and a public sphere" (Kruse et al., 2017, p. 77) are thought to be absent. Previous research also indicates that many people do not use social media platforms to participate in public conversation (Moe et al., 2019). The interviewees of this thesis socialize and discuss matters in closed spaces that are not open to "potential dialogue partners who are present as bystanders or could come on the scene and join those present" (Habermas, 1992/1996, p. 185). Rather, "special measures" are

taken "to prevent a third party from entering" (Habermas, 1992/1996, p. 185). These findings may suggest that social media logics represent (additional) constraints on some people's unwillingness to partake in public discussions. Constraints like these could be seen as barriers needed to be torn down as part of the democratic project, as democracies depend on and facilitate a low threshold for citizens' discussions of public matters (Habermas, 1989/1991).

However, the findings of this thesis indicate that while social media platforms may not be seen mainly as public spaces where partaking in public conversations take place, they are used for other participatory purposes. When I emphasize a lack of partaking and its democratic implications, I am only characterizing parts of a larger picture of the multifaceted reality of public participation. The interviewees are publicly engaged, just in less visible ways. They demonstrate that they are interested in public matters through different routes (Norris, 2003) than the classical normative assumption of public partaking as typically drawn from the deliberative tradition.

Interviewees are occasionally oriented towards the public by observing others (Schudson, 1998; 2000), by learning and gathering information (Moe et al., 2019), and through their private spaces where they occasionally share and discuss content they find informative, interesting, or entertaining with friends (Papacharissi, 2010; 2014). To that end, the interviewees illustrate a participation form that may (1) contribute to public partaking, preparation, and learning (Habermas,

1992/1996; Winsvold, 2013), using "private publics" (Papacharissi, 2014) as "training grounds" (Fraser, 1990, p. 60), which (2) may contribute to public connection (Couldry et al., 2010; Moe, 2020). While this research cannot determine or evaluate the potential extent of public connection, it demonstrates that interviewees' "everyday practices of media consumption" (Couldry et al., 2010, p. 5) and usage are tied to participation forms that may facilitate public orientation, learning, and potentially, connection, despite a lack of public partaking. While the interviewees' participation mostly does not surpass individualized observation and privately contained discussion, they are connected to places where public issues are voiced, fought over, worked through and discussed (see Couldry et al., 2010). 'Non-visible participation' can carry important democratic functions. Such connections are likely to enable "shared frames of reference that enable them to engage and participate within their cultural, social, civic and political networks" (Swart et al., 2018, p. 4331; see also Couldry et al., 2010), and experiences "of belonging" (Berlant, 2008, p. 25) to a larger community.

Orientation as participation has been considered an integral part of postmodern citizenship (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007), which perhaps could be particularly suited to countries where individualization is strong (e.g., Van Oorschot et al., 2005). In her 2010 contribution, Papacharissi, furthermore, stated that "in contemporary democracies the citizen becomes politically emancipated via a private sphere of reflection, expression, and behavior" (p. 132). While the monitorial citizen concept describes a more unaccompanied and individualized form of

participation as orientation to the public, private publics describe one of the ways in which societal and democratic orientations take place *among people*. The discussions happening in these spaces may be both 'societal' and 'democratic', despite not being public. The term "private publics" is not an oxymoron. Rather, 'the social' carry and invite elements of "both public and private practices without being subsumed by either" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 49). Private publics are socially motivated spaces, but have an orientation to the public, and may work as "safe havens or spaces of encouragement to share or discuss news" (Swart et al., 2018, p. 4341). Private publics thus illustrate one of the ways in which citizens may connect to the larger public and other citizens in contemporary democracies[29], using current communication technologies (Papacharissi, 2014).

When we only consider "'speaking up' in public spaces as the definition of online participation" it leaves us with only "half the story" (Crawford, 2011, p. 72). Furthermore, characterizing all refrainment from partaking in public conversations as democratically damaging may be too idealistic, illustrated by the longstanding problem within democratic theory of people choosing not to participate (e.g., Carpentier, 2011). This 'problem' is reflected in the fact that 'everyone' has never participated equally due to social hierarchies and power (Fraser, 1990), and that speaking up for the sake of speaking up is not necessarily

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[29] See Papacharissi (2010) for a more comprehensive discussion about why these kinds of civic activities may be particularly relevant in contemporary democracies, including and beyond the development of communication technologies.

democratically valuable (e.g., Walzer, 1999; Ahlström-Vij, 2012; Christiano, 2018). Orientation without public partaking as default, with partaking when considered necessary (Schudson, 1998; 2000), may be both valuable and more feasible. Findings thus suggest that researchers should acknowledge such a broad scope of "the spatiality of citizenship" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 132). It enables research to capture more nuance about how people participate.

Furthermore, although participation has always been more multifaceted than visible partaking in public discussions, orientation as participation may be further engendered by the proliferation of social media (cf. Keane, 2009; 2018; Crawford, 2011; Jensen & Schwartz, 2021). Observation may, in fact, be particularly facilitated on social media platforms. The social media landscape enables gathering information, observing others, as well as communicating with close, semi-close, and weaker ties. As people become accustomed to social media logics while staying avoidant to their workings, social media logics may thus further invite private publics. This suggests that we need to look beyond public partaking when analyzing social media and participation, and thus beyond visible traces of people's interactions, towards what is not visible but still has participatory relevance. The concept of 'private publics' has been used pragmatically as it offers an entry point to highlight the participatory role of orientation.

Questions arise, however, regarding how to draw boundaries around the concept of participation. A conceptual difficulty namely

concerns the extent to which orientation *without* discussion and sharing in private publics (such as shown in Study 2) would constitute participation, or whether it could more properly be described as 'civic engagement'. As Hooghe and Dejaeghere (2007, p. 255) argue, referring to Schudson (2000) and Norris (1999), the fact that practices are individualized do not preclude them being understood as participation: "both authors assume that the linkage between citizens and the state can be maintained by means of more individualized forms of participation" (p. 255).

However, if participation requires that practices (here orientation) need to be communicative, that is, not just that others are present and expressive, but that one's own presence is explicit and matters directly, individualized orientation without partaking in public nor in private publics could thus end up not being 'participation proper'. In this view, without communication, orientation could constitute civic engagement, learning, and facilitate public connection, and thus be relevant to participation, but not be understood under the concept of participation. For example, the young Norwegians interviewed in Study 2 describe being spectators, and sharers and discussants privately. The latter requires a social network (see, for example, Yates & Lockley, 2018 for a discussion about social class and social media use). To people that refrain from partaking in public discussions, and who lack a social network, participating in closed groups – or 'private publics' - may not be feasible. In this view, orientation without communication, neither in

public nor in private, may better be described as channels to participation, rather than participation proper.

I would argue, however, that individualized forms of participation, such as reflected in the monitorial citizen, must be recognized as informing participation as a non-conclusive concept. While the broad definition of participation as used in this thesis could mistakenly enable the inclusion of practices that are actually not participatory (e.g., Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013), it simultaneously allows recognizing that 'participation' is a non-conclusive and "abstract concept" (Danermark et al., 2002). In this thesis, this has enabled a sensitivity to different participatory practices and nuances, as not operating on an even level with regards to intensity, but as still relevant when speaking about participation (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). It has enabled not forcing findings into concepts or overlooking findings when not fitting into a pre-established set of concepts, but tailoring concepts to more clearly reflect the empirical, in cooperation with theory fit to understand them. 'Private publics' are for example not connected to the larger public without its members' orientation, through monitorial practices. This is a part of participation as expressed through 'private publics' (see Papacharissi, 2010), which in turn may be seen more appropriate to people who avoid, while taking for granted, social media logics.

In summary, my findings inform one way that social media logics influence participation, namely through people's experience and

perception of these logics as constraints and risk, which in turn can be seen to enable people to employ circumventing practices and value privateness. Hence, this pertains to the participatory practices of people that do not aim for an audience outside of their immediate circle of friends. The next section will describe how participation is influenced by social media logics in cases where people express themselves in public. Here, resistance towards dominating understandings or structures in the larger public also shape how attention is sought to be socially recognized. I will discuss how social media platforms' different mobilizations of social media logics matter to people's participation. On TikTok, people can easily take on roles merely as audience members. They do not need to actively select social connections or form communities themselves, which is a fundamental assumption in social media logics theory.

5.4   Utilizing social media logics: Resistance and Hyperconnected publics

In this section, I discuss how participation is influenced by social media logics through people's mobilization of these logics to attain attention and community. The findings demonstrate how people may act merely as audience members on TikTok, underpinned by the platform's programmability and automated connectivity, counteracting assumptions about social media logics' distributive features (e.g., Klinger & Svensson, 2015). On TikTok, content distribution does not rely on whether or not users decide to share it, but on its viral quality,

that is, whether or not it entices attention (as in people's watching of content). TikTok thus demonstrates that social media are not homogenous. Instead, social media logics materialize differently depending on the platform's specific mobilization of principles (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). This section further discusses how attention-seeking actors whose messages entice emotions such as fear and anger may be particularly rewarded by social media logics through virality. This indicates that social media logics provide an uneven playing field – particularly damaging to marginalized individuals who experience resistance from anti-egalitarian and –liberal actors. Contextual considerations of different hyperconnected publics should thus be considered when assessing social media logics' influence.

TikTok's content feed is a materialization of social media logics. It facilitates interactivity and connectivity between people, represent an aim for "constant updating in fragmented publics" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4657), and is where popularity is predicted and boosted (Gillespie, 2018). TikTok demonstrates an unprecedented facilitation of unknown persons to 'go viral' 'over night'. Programmed flows like these are mobilized to capture the attention of audiences and glue them to the screen (Williams, 1974). On TikTok, users may in relatively immediate ways play parts in programmability, that is, in the development of content distribution, through interacting with content. This interaction does not require direct connective actions (such as liking or commenting on a video). Watching or scrolling past content also matters. It is read by the social media platform as indications of preference. Through these

actions, people engage in giving content distributive relevance. Rather than actively selecting which people or content one is interested in[30], people are put together with content, and in turn people, by the platform, thus shaping their content feeds. The platform, rather than the users, make sure that the social connective elements of social media logics, "peers", "like-minded others", and "interest-based networks" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 33) are secured. Speaking to "likeminded others", and "peers", in "interest-based or peer-networks" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015) is thus particularly enabled on TikTok, fueling "connections/alignments with emotionally and ideologically similar others" which "inevitably, entail digital disconnections/dis-alignments with emotionally and ideologically unrecognizable others" (Kissas, 2022, p. 8). This makes TikTok a particularly fruitful tool for people to connect with others in similar positions (e.g., Young, 2000) and/or with similar opinions. TikTok is thus an example of how social media logic's principle of "programmability", the steering of data traffic, is fully utilized – in combination with the other principles of datafication, connectivity, and popularity – to provide an endless, "programmed flow" with "quick turnover" of content (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 4).

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[30] For example, on Instagram, people choose who to follow and be updated on in their content feed. After this, the platform sorts and evaluates excactly how content appears (alongside non-user-selected advertisements and platform recommendations). On TikTok, this active selection is also possible, however, the results from such selection are provided on by an optional, alternative, and not automatically featured content feed, as addition to the "For you"-page, presented as the main content feed.

TikTok, in unprecedented ways, comes "in as many versions as there are users" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 195). The "affordance for fragmented publics" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 29) within the TikTok-universe, due to its strong personalization, is witnessed in the study presented in article 3. Content creators utilize social media logics' connectivity, programmability, and popularity, through the functions of datafication enabling these principles, to acquire community, attention, and to 'go viral'. Social media logics spark counter-public formations, enabling a speedier process of counter-public steps (e.g., Dicenzo et al., 2011) while their virality and visibility functions open such steps up to a circular rather than linear process. That is, counter-publics' in-group conversations and constructions are not non-public, nor are such conversations, with their claims, first made visible to the larger public once they decide to make them so.

Research within the social media logics literature has emphasized concepts such as "shareability" and "shareworthiness" in relation to journalism – news values that influence journalists to produce news for the platforms that people would like to share (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019, p. 48; Nowak-Teter & Łódzki, 2023). In Hurcombe and colleagues' words (2021): "shareability is a fundamental logic of social media platforms" (p. 383). Klinger and Svensson (2015) argue that since information is distributed "from user to user, like a chain letter" (p. 8), we "cannot talk about 'audiences' or subscribers" (p. 8) on social media platforms. I believe TikTok contests this notion. By 'following' individuals, 'liking' videos and looking at content, people 'subscribe'

and give indications about what they prefer to watch, as audiences. In some ways, TikTok acts as a video-sharing platform, as a Youtube but for shorter attention spans, rather than a social media platform inviting user production and updating. Furthermore, the way TikTok opens to an immediate stream of videos, where people must scroll from one video to the next, has a likeness to surfing through television channels. As people do not need to directly connect to others in order to receive tailored content, they *can* participate merely as audience member.

Schellewald (2023) provides a valuable exploration into the particular "escapist and entertainment experience" (p. 1570) inherent to TikTok. Escapism is here, Schellewald shows, closely related to people's impact on and utilization of the strong and tailored personalized content feed facilitated by TikTok's algorithms, making it a distinct space for entertainment and meaningful scrolling, recognition and relatability, distinguishing it from for example Twitter and Instagram, which contrary to TikTok (according to Schellewald's interviewees) contained things such as updates from friends and acquaintances' lives, public interests, and news. TikTok's "viralization" (Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2022, p. 1730), as a commonly known distinct feature of TikTok, also reflects how social media platform specific features and "languages" (Anter, 2023, p. 14), or "platform vernaculars" (Gibbs et al., 2015), matter for how we understand different social media participation forms. Furthermore, users may experience more of a "top-down broadcasting" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 32) as usually related to mass media logic on TikTok, than on other social media platforms, while connecting with

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others. This illustrates how mass media logics and social media logics can intersect (Klinger & Svensson, 2015) in specific ways depending on platform-specific features, which in turn invite certain kinds of practices and logics-mixtures. Although the theory of social media logics commonly refers to general common logics (Anter, 2023), social media thus have specific features and mechanisms playing off those logics in certain ways. Social media platforms are not homogenous, and may lean on or express certain social media logics more than others. On TikTok, this especially pertains to its automated connectivity and prompting of virality.

5.4.1 Social media logics' uneven playing field

Users have a central position in distributing content on social media. Here, Klinger and Svensson (2015) say content must have a "specific viral quality that provokes users to spread it around" (p. 8) or else it "will not reach beyond a very limited circle of supporters" (p. 8). TikTok circumvents this principle by distributing content on users' behalf [31]; TikTok distributes content 'For you'. While people's sharing of personal

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[31] Altough user sharing still counts on TikTok, illustrated in Andrew Tate's "business model" (relying on people spreading his content, in turn receiving advantages in his "hustlers' university"-program), article 3 demonstrates that watching or liking content is enough for the platform to receive indications about a video's potential, and about a person's preferences, instigating (alongside likes, and comments) TikTok's distribution to people's content feeds.

information is still pivotal to social media platform's connection of audiences to advertisers, algorithmically steered personalization does not require active sharing. Views and time spent watching content also give indications prompting content distribution. People may thus implicitly give content distributive relevance. Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) connectivity-principle emphasize how both users and platforms influence content distribution and social connections, rather than overtly emphasizing people's explicit actions of connecting. Content does not necessarily need to have "shareability" or "shareworthiness" (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019, p. 48), to engender explicit behaviors (Haim et al., 2018) on all social media platforms. On social media platforms such as TikTok, content necessarily needs to have attention-acquiring characteristics.

Altheide (2004) has described how politicians tailor messages to get attention, by adjusting to "the dramatization style in media discourses, to short soundbites, as well as to visual and entertainment formats" (p. 294). On TikTok, creators aiming for virality need to grab people's attention quickly in a never-ending stream with quick overturn of content. Findings in Article 3 demonstrate strategies to acquire attention, and illustrate how creators may particularly benefit from adapting to social media logics. Many creators in the anti-democratic counter-public for instance rely on 'rage baiting', using anger, resentment, or fear, in their videos. The use of "rage baiting", that is, carving messages in attempts to provoke people to react, has previously been considered a particularly successful, and increasingly used,

attention-getting tool on TikTok (e.g., Chen, 2022) and other social media platforms, as harassment, hate, and insults have all been successful tools in generating "likes, views, comments, and retweets" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 201). Through their engagement-enhancing qualities, rage and fear may be easily rewarded by social media logics' principles, as they entice virality, connectivity, and popularity (e.g., Gillespie, 2018). Previous research has identified strategies of fueling rage and fear from groups aiming to prevent egalitarian progress, in order to protect traditional social orders, seen in language about protecting 'the nation' or 'the past' (e.g., Nikunen et al., 2021). Research has particularly identified such strategies as central to far-right communities' support strategies (e.g., Jost, 2019; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). Research has also suggested that controversial political parties, particularly right-wing populist parties, are especially successful in terms of acquiring engagement on social media (e.g., Larsson, 2017).

TikTok's promotion of automated connectivity and the distributive rationale of "popularity" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013) and "viralization" (Vásquez-Herrero et al., 2022, p. 1730), are inherent to TikTok's "attention-maximizing" (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). This materializes in popular individuals 'going viral'. By 'rage baiting' and promoting a neoliberal subjectivation trope (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019) of 'alpha male' success and domination (Ging, 2019), figures such as Andrew Tate have acquired millions of followers, views, and fan accounts. While social media logics have challenged traditional attention-getting trajectories to journalism and politics (e.g., Lewis &

Molyneux, 2018; Severin-Nielsen, 2023), social media may represent unprecedented attention-getting opportunities to TikTok-creators such as the ones investigated in Article 3. Their popularity can spread to mainstream media, seen for instance in publications in Norwegian mass media where Norwegians support, mimick, or discuss the actors present in the hyperconnected public scrutinized in Study 3 (see, for example, Schwebs, 2022; Jarstad et al., 2022). Consequently, social media logics may support the mainstreaming of anti-democratic opinions in online environments (see Eslen-Ziya, 2022; Engebretsen, 2022; see, however, Ihlebæk & Holter, 2021), and benefit anti-democratic individuals' attention-seeking beyond social media platforms (cf. Darmstadt et al., 2019) by spreading over to mass media discourses (see, for example, Schwebs, 2022; Jarstad et al., 2022).

While social media often claim to be neutral platforms where unconstrained participation can take place, they can also "invite, facilitate, amplify, and exacerbate" hate, misinformation, and radical viewpoints (Gillespie, 2018, p. 206-207). The anti-democratic counter-public formation and democratic counter-public formation thus illustrate social media's "double-edged sword of empowerment" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 11). While van Dijck and Poell (2013) refers here to the empowerment of users on the one hand and social media platforms on the other, this could also refer to the double-edge sword of how social media logics facilitate empowerment for marginalized individuals. Users are empowered as they very quickly can find relevant content, like-minded others, create communities, senses of belonging and a shared

language. This is also the case, however, for radical creators and individuals with anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal views standing in direct opposition to such marginalized individuals. As Gillespie (2018) points out, as social media business models rely on a principle of popularity "as the core proxy of engagement" (p. 201), platforms have often erred "on the side of encouraging as many people to stay as possible, imposing rules with the least consequences, keeping troublesome users if they can, and bringing them back quickly if they can't" (p. 201). Although marginalized individuals may benefit from social media logics, they may also be harmed by them, as anti-egalitarian actors can utilize social media logics to uphold marginalization.

Findings thus suggest that counter-publics likely do not play on an even participatory field with regards to social media logics. However, as democratic counter-publics exist as a function of their exclusion (Dicenzo et al., 2011; Fraser, 1990/2010), rooted in and resisting domination (e.g., Negt & Kluge, 1972), these two counter-publics do not participate on an even participatory field even when we disregard the relevance of social media logics (see, for example, Okafor, 2022). While the democratic counter-public needs a transformation of "discourses and the structures of the public sphere itself from within" (Habermas, 1992, p. 429), anti-democratic voices can employ traditional established notions of a gender binary (e.g., Monro & Van Der Ros, 2018), tap into traditional social roles framed as natural (Butler, 2010) and portray any progress towards a social constructivist understanding of gender as damaging and untruthful. As marginalized individuals' claims gain

traction and recognition, their aims may be perceived to challenge previously more stable social orders (e.g., Kandiyoti, 2016). The anti-democratic hyperconnected public reflect disputes about and reactions to marginalized individuals' fights for societal recognition (including legal rights and representation in social and political terms, cf. Driessen & Nærland, 2022). This illustrates that looking to the context of hyperconnected publics makes clear how different hyperconnected publics may not equally benefit from, or be harmed by, social media logics. Democratic counter-publics may find both obstacles and possibilities in social media logics.

While Article 3 demonstrates the materialization of social media logics through investigating content developments in content feeds, Article 2 describes how people may experience some of the underlying principles for such distribution to happen, especially datafication, connectivity, and popularity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Social media logics can influence participation, seen in private publics of public orientation (Article 2), and through supporting spaces of resistance as they enable automated formation of counter-public while enabling visibility and 'going viral'.

More is involved in social media participation than private discussions and resistance from minorities and radical actors. Public conversations online have been studied since the dawn of the (popularized) internet. Despite the large amount of research done in this

area, few studies consider the public conversations on Instagram, and even fewer discuss such conversations in light of social media logics.

5.5 Adapting to social media logics: Conversations of public matter (re)construction

In this section, I discuss how participation is influenced by social media logics through people's adaption when partaking in public conversations. As is reflected in Article 1, this includes adaption to 'the personal' when discussing public matters. It can also be withessed in an adaption to social media logics' emphasis on movement which does not invite reciprocity. I then move on to discuss the implications of adapting to these aspects, to the developments of public conversations in a deliberative democratic sense, and how we can understand social media logics as inviting a particular kind of public conversation. That is, a conversation where public matters are negotiated and (re)constructed, and where struggles pertaining to liberation and injustice may be fought over.

The comment sections and the posts they follow illustrate that social media logics invite personal orientation, creation, and revelation (van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2016), and that people may adapt to these aspects when engaging in conversations on social media. The posts for instance all point to a public matter by using some kind of personal edge: either by using their own selves as point of

departure to talk about matters, or by using others as representations of a problematic issue. In the comment sections studied, people engage in conversations where personal experiences and viewpoints are present, discussing the existence, extent, and definition of public matters (Fraser, 1990/2010). The personalized environment of social media has previously been described as a blurring of public and private boundaries (Jensen, 2007; Papacharissi, 2010), also in terms of how people view practices and representations (Vatnøy, 2017). Vatnøy (2017) suggests that the "encounter setting" (p. 285) of social media platforms prompts an "argument culture in which public debate is largerly approached as personal disagreement" (p. 285), that invites matters that can easily be personalized (see also Graham, 2009). Social media invites low-threshold issues (Vatnøy, 2017). These are issues that do not require much subject-specific knowledge in order to have an opinion about them, and are rather easily related to personal experiences. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) point out, it may be "easier to become participants in" conversations where "boundaries between public and private" (p. 752) are absent.

Social media logics likely describe and support these tendencies. In Klinger and Svensson's (2016) words, the "sharing of (personal) information is an online ideal" (p. 33). Sharing information prompts connectivity (van Dijck & Poell, 2013) as there is more content, and data indicating preferences, that can be used to make further connections between users and content, as well as further users. People are thus invited to share personal information, and to personalize information, by

both social media logics and the social media environment at large. While the latter explains the emphasis on 'the person' (e.g., requiring that every individual sets up of a profile, and conducts all interactions and practices through this online persona), social media *logics* in this case further explain the norms and taken for grantedness of creating, publishing, and sharing content as person. Personalized messages and the perceptions that profiles should be updated, and that they represent "one's image, life story, and interests" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p. 30; see also Vatnøy, 2017), for instance, hints to such normalization of social media logics.

Social media platforms and logics thus invite conversations where public and private matters are molded and negotiated, and may in turn enable individualized orientations to public matters (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Expressions and conversations about personal and private matters have previously been understood as generating understanding and societal recognition, including insight about different people's life situations, challenges, about social problems and their relation to larger structures (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004; Berlant, 2008; Ytre-Arne, 2011). Article 1 discusses how social media invites moral positioning in its public debates through an emphasis on persons and individuals (e.g., Andersen, 2020), and how this may prevent cooperative discussion about 'truth' and (in)justice.

There are, however, also other features of the social media environment that may influence non-reciprocity. Online conversations

are easily found, entered, and left behind. The ease in which participants can simply leave conversations may contribute to a large amount of utterances and proclamations over (more) reciprocal debates. Participants are, furthermore, not engaged in the conversation simultaneously. A user may in fact never return to check how the conversation played out, unless directly responded to (prompting notifications). The information and interaction abundant environment on social media platforms furthermore make it likely that one does not receive a response. An individual utterance is just one among many, in one of many comment sections. Social media logics and algorithms invite such non-reciprocity. Researching comment sections thus yields knowledge beyond the influence of social media logics' emphasis on the personal. Social media logics also invite movement. Content should move in order to support and sustain connectivity, programmability, popularity, and (new points for) datafication. The principle of programmability describes social media platforms' aim for a "programmed flow" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 4) of content, to deal with information and communication surplus (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Engesser et al., 2017), and to keep people's attention (Klinger & Svensson, 2016; Lupinacci, 2020). "Constant updating" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4662) has thus been regarded an inherent part of social media logics' distributive principle. Algorithms determine content's relevance and weight (Gillespie, 2014) and thus function as intermediaries and agenda setters (König, 2022), where movement is key for attention and engagement. Social media logics both suggest, and are

upheld, by *new* content being proposed to people's content feeds (see, for example, Gillespie, 2018; Lupinacci, 2020). This likely requires users to make active choices about navigating back to a place of conversation, unless they are notified by tagging by other users. In this sense, social media logics may thus not support reciprocity in singular conversations.

Reciprocity in the deliberative tradition implies explicit responsivenesss to an utterance (Habermas, 1992/1996). The principle requires that a person engages in dialogue by considering others' arguments and reasons when giving arguments back (Löb & Wessler, 2021). Reciprocity thus involves a back and forth discussion between discussants that "honestly consider" others' claims (Rinke, 2016, p. 7), in cooperating to reach a shared common ground, or the best argument (Habermas, 1981/1984). In reciprocal conversations, people ideally express themselves, follow and evaluate other's utterances. A familiarity with or immersion in social media logics may thus prevent this ideal of following the course of a conversation. Social media logics rather prompt continuous fluctuation, moving people in and out of different conversations. This challenge to the reciprocity principle may suggest that the deliberative capacities of social media fail to live up to the ideal[32]. This includes, for instance, adding further arguments to the discussion, prospects for making changes, and the overall extent and

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[32] On the other hand, social media make mediated communication more 'in synch'and in line with in-person communication than previous communication technologies (see, for example, Latzo-Toth, 2010). People can, for instance, update each other the minute they have gathered information or witnessed an incident (Zhang & Leung, 2014).

development of conversations (as distinguished from a necessary consensus as end goal). Moral positionings (which are invited by social media's emphasis on 'the personal', see Article 1; Andersen, 2020), may particularly hinder a cooperative search for agreement and shared understandings. In other words, it may be difficult to reach a stage of elaboration, consideration, and moderation of viewpoints.

While there is scarce explicit responsiveness between utterances in the comment sections analyzed in Article 1, this thesis cannot say anything about its participants' take aways from these discussions, or about people looking at the comment sections, but not participating. When disagreeing parties agree that a problem exists, utterances (instead of reciprocal conversation) may serve as representations of different opinions and actors, and how they may relate to each other, which on-lookers can also take advantage of (see for example Löb & Wessler, 2021). Conversations with opposing viewpoints and perspectives can thus be fruitful in a deliberative democratic sense as they can make different positions around a public dispute clear to potential viewers, depending on the justification and argumentative complexity of arguments (Jakob et al., 2021). Disagreeing parties can be distinguished and clarified. The comment sections, however, show that parties largely disagree as to whether or not problems exist, and if they agree, they do not agree about its extent or relevance. Rather than serving as representations of different opinions around certain established issues, then, such conversations may actually be fruitful in a deliberative sense first and foremost to the extent that they contribute to the exchange of

perspectives in large scale societies, enablig people to discover and consider other people's issues and problems (Habermas, 2006).

There is plenty of research demonstrating that online conversations do not live up to these ideals (e.g., Jakob et al., 2021; Dahlberg, 2001a; Hagemann, 2002; Jankowski & van Os, 2004; Strandberg, 2008; Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2020). Although conversations in the comment sections are not oriented towards mutual understanding in the ideal deliberative sense, or cooperate through reciprocity, they can be understood as negotiations of public matters, and part of the search for a common understanding as a public. While there are clear distinctions between the Instagram and TikTok-material (one being that the comment sections, despite the lack of reciprocity, represent interaction between people, and that the TikTok-material represent production and distribution of content in front of audiences), they both illustrate conversations about truth, where positioning 'the other' as immoral is inherent to the conversational format, through discussing what is right, good, or (in)correct. Thus, these are conversations about what *are* problems, in what ways they constitute a problem (Wodak, 2001; Fraser, 1990/2010).

The comment sections furthermore represent interest, dispute, and concern with what is just. As described by Banet-Weiser and Higgins (2023), disputes about (in)justice may be closely related to disputes about truth, and a heightened awareness to different truth-claims. Social media platforms can increase attention to and disputes about truth. As

'truth' is closely related to power hierarchies, such disputes may easily pertain to (in)justice. The discussions about truth and justice illustrate struggles around the recognition of public matters, their existence, and extent. They arise as there are no clear-cut answer to whether the issues are problems of injustices or not, or inappropriateness or not. The issues they raise represent issues where "there is no real expert knowledge" (Peters, 1997, p. 40). In public discussion about matters where there are no clear-cut answers, "moral aspects" (Peters, 1997, p. 40) may be heavily present. Social media logics and platforms may thus invite conversations dealing with not yet established matters – matters that cannot be understood through one singular expert source (see also Vatnøy, 2017). Issues that concern freedom, justice, and equality, where self-expressions are pivotal, have been considered especially relevant to political and social life in modern developed countries (e.g., Giddens, 1990; Inglehart, 1997; Welzel et al., 2003; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). These are matters that concern 'who to be' and 'how to act' as members of a society (e.g., Kjeldsen, 2016; 2018), where there often is no clear-cut answer. As seen in the comment sections, the participants engage in continuous (re)construction of such matters. Social media logics and platforms may thus facilitate suitable places for discussions about such matters, as social media logics, for instance, invite personal emphases, moral positionings, and expression rather than reciprocal conversation.

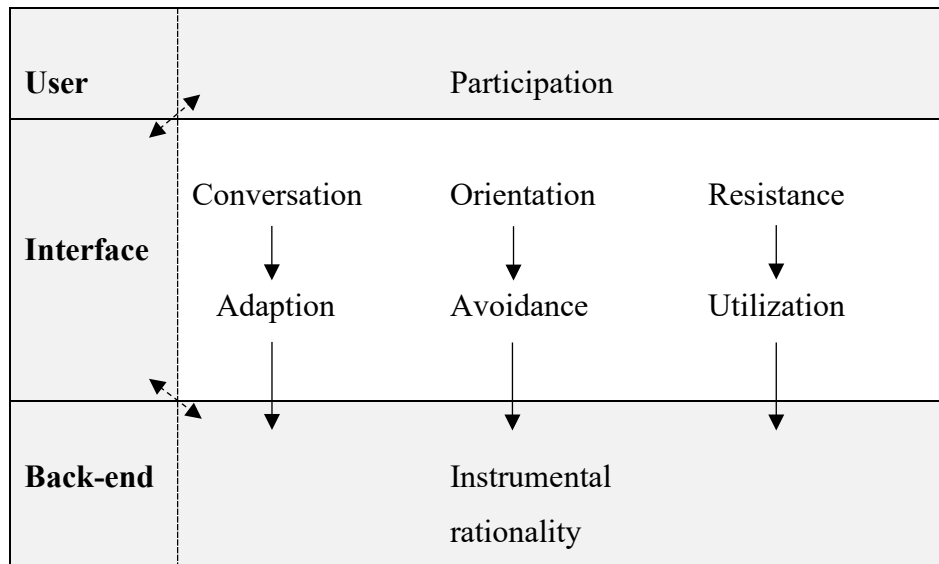## 5.6 Social media logics' economic background and deliberative perspectives

As increasingly prominent spaces and distributors of information and communication in the Norwegian public and beyond, social media platforms provide public spaces with certain "inherent rules" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4654). These rules, or social media logics, are built from and support the attention economy and profit incentives of platform companies, rather than (mainly, or first and foremost) democratic ideals. Social media platforms are heavily steered by financial aims. Currently, social media logics can be seen as the materialization of these aims. This contradicts traditional ideals and principles in the deliberative democratic tradition. While economic influence, or structuring, is not necessarily damaging to a democratic society merely by its presence (e.g., see Habermas' (1981/1984) discussion of the place of instrumental and strategic action in large-scale societies), it should not have power in democratic processes. Monetary influence in areas which are conducive to citizens' mutual understanding and democratic participation is thus problematic insofar as it creates "disturbances" (Wessler, 2018, p. 45), as when for-profit imperatives trump democratically fruitful communication and processes. Information and participation processes should in other words be unconstrained. Power shouldn't steer the ways in which information is created and travel between citizens (Habermas, 1989/1991). The influence of economic interests in communicative processes thus at first sight goes against conditions that are beneficial to a healthy public sphere (Habermas, 1989/1991). People's interaction and

information are handled in ways oriented 'to success' rather than 'to understanding' (Habermas, 1981/1984).

Eide (2004) has described how media logics can follow such instrumentalist notions, warning against its impact on political life and the public sphere, where conversations should ideally be oriented towards deliberative aims, and not towards, for example, most effectively conveying one's message with most impact on preferred audiences (Eide, 2004). As Article 3 demonstrates, anti-democratic actors use language particularly rewarded by TikTok's algorithms. They attract attention through virality. Moreover, social media logics may not invite public partaking on social media – they may rather be seen as reasons not to partake.

Table 3 illustrates, in a simplified manner how participation is negotiated vis a vis social media logics (in a Habermasian notion), considering the "double articulations" (Langlois et al., 2009) at play as people participate on social media. The double articulation here refers to how users participate on 'the surface' of the interface. Here, action possibilities, combined with users' perceptions and actions, enable different kinds of practices. The 'back-end' of the interface shape these action possibilities as well as retrieve data from their usage:

Table 3: Negotiating instrumental rationality

User	Participation		
Interface	Conversation ↓ Adaption ↓	Orientation ↓ Avoidance ↓	Resistance ↓ Utilization ↓
Back-end	Instrumental rationality		

The "back-end" here refers to social media platforms' "data process and analysis" (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 6). Social media's back-end represents a means-end-rationality that aims for egocentric (e.g., Blau, 2019) success and profit. People's practices are created into data, which in can be analyzed and utilized, for instance, to successfully connect actors such as third party businesses and ordinary people (Parker et al., 2016; van Dijck et al., 2018). In the literature review, I suggested that putting one set of rationales up against, or in light of, other kinds of logics or aims can be a fruitful way to investigate how contesting goals or norms may stand in contrast, or be influenced by one another. Table 3 illustrates how people – with their diverging goals and assumptions – may react to the rationality of social media logics.

As Klinger and Svensson argue (2018) "humans cannot anticipate all the ripple effects of" algorithms "designs and doings" (p. 4667). These logics are not always actively employed, but naturalized and assumed in different contexts. Table 3 illustrates how "what remains invisible" and is "thus unquestioned and accepted as the norm" (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 13), may be unlocked to understand its influence on participation, or how and why people's participation on social media unfolds. This thesis demonstrates, albeit with a small sample, what listening to people's experiences, understandings, and thoughts about their own practices, can tell us in this regard.

Social media logics' materializations are likely to develop to better support the incentives of social media platforms, in line with how technological possibilities change and evolve (Hurcombe et al., 2018), and in combination with different social media 'cultures' (e.g., Gibbs et al., 2015; Anter, 2023). Algorithmic filtering of content in content feeds has for example changed from being mostly chronological (e.g., Bossetta, 2018) to being based on relevance. This thesis thus highlights the change from a primarily user-based distribution, to algorithmically engendered content relevance, distribution, and virality based on assumed user preference. Social media logics' materialization thus cannot be determined once and for all. Neither can, perhaps, assumptions about connectivity, programmability, popularity, and datafication (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), as provided by Klinger and Svensson (2015).

The findings of this thesis also support longstanding advocacies that broader understandings of participation should be employed (e.g., Papacharissi, 2010; Moe, 2020). This thesis particularly highlights private publics, orientation, and public conversations where public matters are negotiated and molded. At the same time, this thesis cannot answer to what extent social media logics create "disturbances" (Wessler, 2018, p. 45) rather than prospects, at large. Hence, it also refrains from engaging in a discussion about the findings' potential place in a deliberative system (e.g., Mansbridge et al., 2012; Nærland & Engebretsen, 2023). The aim of this thesis has not been to evaluate effect, consequences, or extent, and it has thus chosen to leave out systemic theories of deliberation, relevant for assessing the contributions of such findings to democracy at large. This thesis rather identifies negotiated participation forms that can be seen through the lens of social media logics, while reminding us that media technology is not neutral or self-determinant, but created by humans and their context and (oftentimes naturalized) incentives.

5.7 Concluding summary

The internet promised "not only that everyone could speak" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 209), but unconstrained participation. Research has since shown that a soberer understanding of the internet and democratic life is needed to understand the many (including unmediated) factors relevant to participation. This thesis has investigated how participation can be

influenced by social media logics. I have shown how participation on social media platforms is negotiated and molded against social media logics. Social media logics theory assumes people's participation, and that people are accustomed to these logics. The participatory practices uncovered in this thesis, however, demonstrate that social media are not primarily used in ways that align with social media logics. Through this dissertation, I have demonstrated that while social media logics remain useful theoretical principles, their consequences or demands are not inevitable. Social media platforms develop continuously, as do people's negotiated participation.

I find that social media logics invite certain kinds of participation. Social media logics may invite certain kinds of societal conversations, particularly conversations where public matters are (re)constructed while reciprocity is challenged. Both these aspects are invited by social media logics. Furthermore, social media logics invite orientation as participation. Social media are thus spaces where 'private publics' (Papacharissi, 2010) emerge. Hence, social media benefit from the mechanisms that make some people retract. That is, while datafication does not just require actions enabling explicit personalization (Haim et al., 2018), and connectivity is enabled without people partaking in public discussions or posting public content, popularity and programmability is easier the more people provide content to social media platforms[33].

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[33] This does not mean that social media platforms do not also benefit from, and may utilize people's use of, closed-off spaces. People's presence and activity add value, to connectivity through datafication, informing for instance programmability and

Social media platforms are also spaces where marginalized communities can gather and form. Social media can even facilitate uneven playing fields, as anger and provocation may be particularly rewarded. Social media are thus spaces of tensions and negotiations between people and social media logics. The 'influence' of these logics is highly contingent. It differs between motivations and participation forms. The role of social media logics to participation thus depends on contextual circumstances. Social media platforms continuously develop to keep their position as prominent players in the platform economy. Scholarship should stay sensitive to such developments, and their consequences to how social media logics may materialize, and influence participation, differently.

Negotiated participation pinpoints the relationship between the human and the system. Mobilizing social media logics literature beyond the institution of journalism and professionalized politics serves to incorporate the tensions between people and platforms into further theory development. Tensions speaks to larger dynamics between technology and humans, specifically between people's self-determination and media technology (e.g., McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1985). The internet, social media platforms, and algorithms that support them, are human-made (Flanagin et al., 2010; Klinger & Svensson, 2018) and thus impacted by social influences and cultural contexts (see for example Feenberg, 2002; Levina & Hasinoff, 2016; Uluorta & Quill,

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popularity, despite not engaging in posting or sharing public content (cf. Van Dijck, 2009).

2022). Social media and its algorithms are not 'naturally' inclined towards the economic incentives that currently underlie social media logics (e.g., Klinger & Svensson, 2014; 2018). Rather, the platform economy serves as the backdrop to social media logics, and hence the ways in which information and communication is processed and distributed on these platforms.

Some creators benefit economically, politically, or socially from social media logics (as described in article 3), while others assume protective strategies against datafication and virality (as described in article 2). While "there are some inherent rules of how the game" (Klinger & Svensson, 2018, p. 4654) of social media platforms work, people do not necessarily follow these rules, or engage in the same kind of game. People negotiate with media's typical 'production-rules' (Dahlgren, 1996). At the same time, negotiation is largely enabled and limited within the social media platforms' circumstance. Social media logics are not neutral or value-free (Klinger & Svensson, 2018). As people are accustomed to social media logics, they adapt to, appropriate (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018), and are avoidant towards social media logics, albeit all within the action possibilities given by social media platforms (van Dijck, 2013) which support social media logics. Such avoidance may still support social media logics, as long as people continue providing traces for datafication, or their attention, for programmability and connectivity.

Accustomization is inherent to media logic, as logics become 'naturalized' in social life. What this thesis demonstrates is that taken-for-grantedness does not necessarily lead to adherence. While social media logics' social consequences may not be theoretically assumed, and may not be empirically followed or accepted, negotiated participation forms nevertheless suggest that tensions appear as these logics form and steer communicative spaces.

5.8   Suggestions for future research

This thesis only provides a starting point to understand the tensions and strategies between participation and social media logics, and further, how this may inform how prominent online communicative arenas are shaped and function in democracy. Future research should look further into different negotiations, including tensions and uses, between people and social media logics across contexts. Comparing people's responses to, and perceptions of, social media logics across contexts such as national borders, socioeconomic backgrounds, life situations, public incidents and topics, can provide more empirical evidence or clarification, and theorization, of how people meet social media logics through their participation.

As social media algorithms and social media logics are tightly knit, such an approach to social media logics also facilitates analyzing further the relationship between people and algorithms. Specifically, the

many avenues through which people experience, perceive, and respond to algorithms. An approach that considers the experienced effects of algorithms, as parts of social media logics, would be particularly useful in this regard. That is, going beyond a narrow focus on how algorithms are understood or perceived, towards how they are experienced, dealt with, and used, in a larger context of participation.

Investigating the relationship between social media logics and participation contributes to our understanding of what kind of 'places' social media platforms facilitate in democratic digital countries such as Norway. This includes whether, how, and in what cases, social media logics are assumed and taken for granted. Such insights can help scholarship further understand the relationship between media logics and public life.

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7   Articles

Article 1

Salte, L. (2024). Talking Facts and Establishing (In)Justice: Discussing Public Matters on Instagram. *International Journal of Communication, 18*, 344-362.
https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/20118/4438

Article 2

Salte, L. (2022). Social Media Natives' Invisible Online Spaces: Proposing the Concept of Digital Gemeinschaft 2.0. *Social Media + Society, 8*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221113076

Article 3

Salte, L., & Sjøvaag, H. (in review). Hyperconnected publics: Algorithmic support of counter-public spaces on TikTok.

Article 1

Talking Facts and Establishing (In)Justice: Discussing Public Matters on Instagram

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This study considers Instagram comment sections, drawing on an in-depth investigation of 400 comments. It identifies forensic rhetoric, so far largely overlooked in online communication research, entangled with epideictic rhetoric, reflecting talk about truth and justice entailing moral positioning. Although participants are oriented toward shared truth construction across disagreement, they are not explicitly oriented toward changing their own opinions or views. This article discusses what this implies in terms of deliberative democratic perspectives, and highlights the need to move beyond stages of proclamations to reach practical reasoning in public conversation. It shows that rhetorical approaches may help elucidate intricacies of online conversations and that forensic rhetoric may emerge to meet pertinent topics of what is true and just. It also contributes to filling the gap of scarce research on Instagram comment sections as places for public conversation.

Keywords: *online communication, rhetoric, public conversation, social media, forensic rhetoric, epideictic rhetoric, deliberative democracy*

How people talk together online has long been of interest to media scholars (e.g., Moore, Gathman, & Ducheneaut, 2009; Zerrer & Engelmann, 2022). Although research has revealed that social media discussions rarely meet deliberative demands (Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2020), the pertinent question of how people discuss public

matters online persists. This is particularly evidenced by scholars' and citizens' more recent concerns that social media plays a crucial part in people's alleged decreased orientation toward shared understandings of truth (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021; Su, Suk, & Rojas, 2022). Although research has debunked concepts such as "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021), people's lack of interaction with disagreeing or differently positioned others is an ongoing topic (Habermas, 2009), reflected in discussions about "post-truth," "fake news," and political polarization (e.g., Ambrosio, 2022). Theorists have claimed that being accustomed to truth uncertainty, prompted by an abundance of information in current media environments, may breed truth-relativism or -apathy (Keane, 2009; Wight, 2018).[34] Consequently, as people may rely on their subjective feelings of what is true (Wight, 2018) or "truthiness" as termed by comedian Stephen Colbert (Newman, Garry, Bernstein, Kantner, & Lindsay, 2012), they may not search for a common understanding as a public.

When investigating Nordic Facebook and Twitter discussions, scholars have found that conversations are dominated by epideictic rhetoric and, hence, moral positionings (see Andersen, 2020; Vatnøy, 2017). Although this illustrates the benefits of looking beyond strict and idealized measurements of public conversation, questions remain as to whether these tendencies, or other rhetorical configurations, transfer to

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[34] Concerns of how people deal with information surplus is, however, not something that first appeared as result of recent technological developments (see, for example, Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004).

the social media platforms that have emerged in recent years. First, the social media platforms that have emerged in recent years have often been multimodal and visually oriented, with Instagram as one example. Instagram is, however, an understudied platform with regard to public interaction, especially when considering its prominence (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). Although studies have used Instagram comment sections as data corpora (see, e.g., Li, 2022), the platform has, until recently, not been investigated as a space for public interactions with the same eagerness as other social media platforms. Second, while the forensic rhetorical genre carries characteristics that are inherent to discussions about truth and justice and the state of guilt or innocence, studies highlighting the genre's presence beyond a court-of-law setting are generally scarce (Harris & Werner, 2021). To the author's knowledge, it has never been used as an analytical lens when approaching online conversations. This is remarkable, as it, when mobilized as an analytical lens together with the two other classical rhetorical genres, may help reveal some of the intricacies of public conversations. Research employing rhetorical lenses to investigate online public engagement is generally still scarce (for exceptions, see Andersen, 2020; Vatnøy, 2017). Asking "What rhetorical genres are used when participants are engaged in conversations about public issues on Instagram?" this article demonstrates the benefits of combining the three classical rhetorical genres of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic as analytical tools. Specifically, it conducts an in-depth analysis of how public issues were discussed in comment sections drawn from two Norwegian public

figures' Instagram posts. The study employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), conducting a close reading of comments (n = 400).

After the theoretical framework and the method section are presented, the analysis shows that the participants sought shared truth construction across disagreements but were seemingly not inclined toward changing their own minds. Participants also condemned or praised others' opinions, views, and behaviors. The discussion emphasizes that while engaging in discussions about what is true may contradict concerns about truth-relativism and truth-apathy, the findings reflect proclamations of truth rather than talk traditionally considered democratically valuable. Conjunctional, forensic and epideictic rhetoric may contribute to sustaining contradictory opinions and views about what is factual rather than resolving tensions and bridging understandings. In particular, the forensic genre is highlighted as a relevant but overlooked genre in communication research.

Rhetorical Genres and the Public

Although the three classical rhetorical genres of the epideictic, forensic, and deliberative offer models of ideal rhetoric and are often not empirically separable (Garver, 2009), they provide fruitful analytical tools to "uncover some of the complicated relationships between speaker (or writer), text, audience and occasion" (Harris & Werner, 2021, p. 620). The epideictic rhetorical genre is commonly employed in commemoration settings (Condit, 1985). Thus, it often appears as moral

evaluations of selves or others and attempts to position someone or something as deserving of praise or blame. As such, it is a useful rhetorical tool to affirm shared values and norms and to reinforce devotions to values underlying political action (Hauser, 1999; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971).[35] Forensic rhetoric, on the other hand, is used to determine what is just; hence, it is most often confined to the court of law. Through accusing or defending, it aims to establish whether a crime has been committed (Levi, 2013; Perelman & Olbrechts- Tyteca, 1971). Speakers often present themselves as objective spokespersons, and audiences are "jurified" as witnesses (Evans, 2021; Palczewski, 2005). When speakers proclaim what is true, ontological contests are invited. These may entail disputes about what has happened, what is continuously happening, or what issues are about. Thus, forensic rhetoric relies heavily on factual claims and providing "proofs" (Harris & Werner, 2021; Pâquet, 2018).

Discussions that entail factual claims and arguments about what is true can be distinguished as a distinct form of reasoning termed "theoretical reasoning" (Kock, 2018). Separating this as a distinct form of communication is useful because arguments about what is true differ from arguments oriented toward future decisions or actions, concerned with what to do regarding an issue (Kock, 2018). The latter kinds of arguments are found in the deliberative rhetorical genre, which places

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[35] This function is however two-sided. See for example Condit (1985, p. 289) on how constructing community and a 'we' – as inherent to the epideictic genre – may have polarizing effects.

itself in the political realm, being "forward-looking" and concerned with "what should be" (Andersen, 2012, p. 199). Thus, the deliberative genre is considered the most suitable for social transformation. Deliberative argumentation weighs different considerations to reach a decision about future action, relying on an Aristotelian understanding (Kock, 2018), and thus places itself as a subcategory of "practical reasoning." In practical reasoning, a suggestion or a choice can be deemed right or wrong but "not either true or false" (Kock, 2018, p. 3).

The deliberative rhetorical genre is echoed in the deliberative democratic tradition and its emphasis on publics' decision-making processes (e.g., Habermas, 1981/1984). Ideally, according to the deliberative tradition, discussions consist of people who speak together across different opinions and life situations (Jakob, Dobbrick, & Wessler, 2021) while listening to each other and giving up their argument if someone provides a better one (Cohen, 2009). Although it makes no sense to deliberate about truth, if relying on an Aristotelian understanding (because something is either true or false), the deliberative democratic tradition recognizes theoretical reasoning. It is ideal that people share assumptions about the world and what they regard as true to agree on their shared situation before moving to ideal forms of public discussion (Habermas, 1981/1984). In instances of theoretical reasoning, it can thus be beneficial to employ ideals inherent to the democratic deliberative tradition, such as listening to others and providing clear claims that can be understood and (potentially) verified (Wessler & Rinke, 2014). The term "cognitive dissonance" has come to describe the

difficulty people may have in altering their views when presented with opposing information, thus illuminating challenges to the fulfillment of these ideals. People are inclined toward making things fit their preconceptions (Festinger, 1962). Nevertheless, while 'truth' has never been found in absolute ways (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021), less emphasis on or concern with 'facts' as something to reach for in joint attempts and co-create would directly counter deliberative democratic processes (Habermas, 2009).

Recognizing theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning as distinctly different kinds of argumentation shows that public conversations that are not explicitly oriented toward future decision making or future action may carry other societal functions (Hauser, 1999; Wessler, 2018; Young, 2002). This theory section has emphasized that a range of communication forms are relevant to society's public conversations and that they cannot be evaluated according to the same set of procedures. Furthermore, ideal notions of a certain form of communication are rarely met empirically (Fishkin, 1995). It is vital to recognize these insights to understand publics' meaning making and conversations. This article aims to follow these insights by mobilizing the three classical rhetorical genres as analytical tools. This enables unwrapping of different kinds of public conversations while staying empirically sensitive to their blurred boundaries.

Methodology

At the time of data collection, in late 2019, two public figures[36] had become known to create controversies in the Norwegian public because of their Instagram posts. One of them (initially known to the Norwegian public as a member of a soccer team whose daily activities were featured in a televised reality show) was particularly known for criticizing other influencers and bloggers for their social media activities. His posts often centered on revealing celebrities' treacherous or immoral behavior while humorously addressing larger societal issues. The other was known as an actor in the Norwegian TV show Skam (see Lindtner & Dahl, 2019) and had taken on a role as a spokesperson for feminist issues. Her Instagram activities were often oriented toward issues of gender inequality. Both secured the selection criteria of topic (orientation to public issues) and popularity (number of followers). Selecting their posts as providers of comment sections thus relied on a purposive sampling rationale (Campbell et al., 2020): Engendering public debates about public issues, the posts' comment sections were considered valuable venues for investigating online conversations on Instagram.

Posts within each public figure's account were coded into two sheets, respectively, providing a descriptive overview of the posts' characters and concerns. Here, concern described what a post addressed (for example, sexualization). Posts' characters describe the means of

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[36] Names of which are not mentioned in this article to strengthen the anonymization of comment section participants.

expression used in the post (e.g., music or video). Three posts were purposefully selected from each public figure, aiming for different cases from each individual's account (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Next, the two posts from each individual with the most comments in their comment sections were chosen for data reduction purposes. Sifting out the comment sections with the least comments, one from each creator, for a "selective reduction" (Mayer, 2015, p. 61) to reduce data was appropriate for the purpose of the study. This selection process fits the study's objectives to provide in-depth description and understanding (Grønmo, 2016), rather than seek quantitative representation. See Table 1 for a sample overview.

Table 1. The Sample: Comment Sections, by Post.

	The post: Issue being addressed & features	Number of comments
"If I were a boy" (personal communication, January 5, 2019)	Gender equality An image where the creator is depicted with facial hair and a shorter hairstyle than usual, with the caption "Finish the sentence: If I were a boy"	1,364
"Showing skin" (personal communication, May 10, 2017)	"Rape culture," sexualization A video where the creator shows and points to different areas of her body, often by "revealing" it from under her clothes. A song by the artist Silvana Imam is playing in the background. The caption is about showing skin not being indicative of whether one wants to be sexualized or engage in sexual intercourse.	2,164
"Celebrity kiss" (personal communication, March 5, 2019)	Gender equality A screenshot depicting a female artist kissing a young boy in the audience. The caption problematizes the artist's behavior, and the newspaper reporting on the incident (not being critical), by presenting a narrative where genders are turned around.	314
"The tent" (personal communication, September 5, 2018)	Power and responsibility Two images depicting before and after an "influencer" has edited a photo to change the appearance of her body. The post's caption criticizes the influencer's editing, emphasizing that the influencer cannot be excused for the editing because her social media activities are a part of her brand and business.	918

All comments from the four Instagram posts were collected (N = 4,760) except for comments stemming from private and deleted profiles, for ethical purposes. The comment sections were handled ethically as "public forums" (Elgesem, 2015), as they were public and adhered to celebrities' public profiles, which were often discussed in the mass media. I rewrote all examples shown in this article for anonymization purposes (Elgesem, 2015) and did not retrieve any information about participants (except for their comment-section contribution). At the time of data collection, comment threading was not a feature implemented on Instagram, so this study relied only on one-level comments.

After importing the comments to the NVivo analysis software, comments where participants engaged in a conversation about a public matter were identified (n = 734) from the overall data corpus. This means, for example, that comments consisting of an "@" (n = 2,456), occasionally with an emoticon or one or two words (n = 1,395), were not used for further analysis from this stage because they did not entail much verbal expression. Rather, comments that proclaimed something or that engaged in discussions with others (directly, by "@" or indirectly, e.g., "all of you") were considered relevant. The first 100 comments from each comment section within this category were used for further inquiry (n = 400). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to detect tendencies in the comment sections without creating a predetermined coding scheme (see Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). This enabled an exploratory approach to the comments, where tentative categories first appearing in the process of ordering the material could be discarded, changed, merged, and clarified as the analysis evolved. A qualitative category-by-category focused analysis, revising and changing categories and subcategories, rendered a close reading of these comments and helped develop categories close to the material. Following the theoretical recognition outlined above, the categories were never mutually exclusive (Tesch, 1990). I used theory and previous research as analysis evolved, going back and forth between theory and the material (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). Eventually, all three rhetorical genres were employed as lenses, and themes were finally identified as relevant overarching "repeated patterns" across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). In line

with thematic analysis, themes were not constructed as "quantifiable measures," but through an in-depth qualitative analysis, aiming to capture "important elements" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) of the comment sections regarding the research question.

A plurality of voices were present in each comment-section sample drawn for in-depth reading. Despite some participants occasionally being more active than others, a theoretical saturation point was considered reached, as no substantive additional revelations appeared by adding more voices (i.e., comments from new users) to the analysis. The 400 comments are reported as one case (Grønmo, 2016) because this approach to comments was deemed useful as the analysis evolved. Occasions in which the four comment sections yielded different patterns are reflected consecutively, as categories are presented in the next section, followed by an in-depth discussion.

Findings

Expressions in the comment sections were generally concerned with what was true rather than what to do about an issue, placing themselves as theoretical reasoning. The state and extent of issues, such as gender inequality, sexualization of women, sex crimes and rape culture (including sexualization of women and victim blaming), civility, authenticity, truthfulness, and public accountability, were discussed frequently across the comment sections. Largely delivered as proclamations about the reality of the social world to convince others,

these are operationalized as ontological contests. Conversations also entailed moral positioning of the self and other(s). Although entangled—a comment concerning the "reality" of gender inequality in Norway could, for example, simultaneously employ or discuss morality—discussions about truth and morality as focal points each rest on the inherent features of forensic and epideictic rhetoric. The details constituting the forensic and epideictic presence in the data of this study are presented in the following sections, followed by a description of the identified traces of reciprocity, justification, and the deliberative genre.

Forensic Rhetoric: Conversations About Truth and Justice

The forensic genre's inherent features include speakers' orientations to truth, justice, and ascription of guilt or innocence. In the comment sections, these features were found in the following categories: factual claims, rule/case reasoning, accusations of cases or persons, and defenses of cases or persons (Evans, 2021; Levi, 2013; Pâquet, 2018). In the first category, factual claims, participants often proclaimed "what kind" of issue a public matter was. This included what the facts were, what was happening or had happened, and what was (im)moral. Comments in this category were thus statements or explicit attempts to convince others of "the one correct" understanding of an issue:

> "@username ok whatever. Every one and a half day there is a woman being killed here. Last year there were almost [number] a month. One can only imagine how many are not included as they are not being

reported" (From the comment section adhering to "If I were a boy," my translation; personal communication, January 5, 2019).

In this comment, the speaker proclaims what the facts are (concerning the extent and scale of women being murdered) by presenting themselves as objective spokespersons; they are simply a provider of the truth, reflecting traits of the forensic genre (Harris & Werner, 2021; Palczewski, 2005; Pâquet, 2018). Although factual claims were spread across comment sections, the comment section adhering to the "If I were a boy" post stood out. Over half of the comments drawn for in-depth inquiry from this comment section could be placed in this category. For example, disputes about the realities of gender (in)equality were common here:

> @username women earn more than men because men do more dangerous work. Besides, almost all fatal accidents at work happen to men. The reason why there are differences in salaries in men's football and women's football is because men's football has a higher level and therefore is more entertaining to watch. (personal communication, January 5, 2019; my translation)

In this example, the commenter contests another participant's claim that unequal pay exists structurally between men and women in men's favor. The commenter provides "proofs" of how social reality "really is" (pertaining to the consequences men face in the workplace and their abilities in sports, as opposed to women's work conditions and sport abilities). Up until now, these examples have also illuminated the fact that conversations were oriented toward matters of justice. Justice was, however, fought over on a level of social recognition—that is,

aiming to make others recognize the factuality of matters as laying the grounds for (in)justice.

Another feature of the forensic genre identified in the comment sections w rule/case reasonings (Levi, 2013). In this study, rule-case reasoning is operationalized to capture negotiations of rules by employing cases beyond legal reasoning into the realm of vernacular and everyday talk. While it can follow a linear three-step process of identifying a rule from one case and then relating that rule to another case (cf. Levi, 2013), the category also captures when people use cases to work through, understand, or point out rules (in a broad sense) that guide and regulate the public. Cases, in the form of, for example, stories or statistics, were used to prove or challenge a "rule" or a "law" in social life, that is, social rules and laws, or customs (seeing custom as a widespread practice in a community), framed as either blameworthy and unwanted, or supported and appraised. Although in some instances, a rule could be employed as an unquestioned "good" (e.g., civility), in other instances, a rule could be heavily criticized as an unwanted but widespread and ongoing practice. An example from the comment section adhering to the post "If I were a boy" illustrates the latter. In this example, "rape culture" as a custom functions as a rule:

> @username the dark figures of how many women that experience assault are HIGH. I am going to court against my abuser in a month or so. I can name [number] friends that have also been raped but haven't dared to report it […]. How can it be, that SO MANY have experienced abuse and that so many jump to the conclusion that the victim is a blaming part? […] I understand that many may have the IMPRESSION

that abuse is something that doesn't happen that often. But don't talk about it as if it's facts, cause it's really not. (personal communication, January 5, 2019; my translation, information omitted for anonymization purposes)

This comment exemplifies the presence of "the personal" in the comment sections. Participants occasionally provided personal stories or examples from their own lives when attempting to convince others of the reality and the extent of an issue (Young, 2002). In the example above, several cases are utilized to create evidence that sexual assault and abuse are not infrequent, nor can they be blamed on victims as singular individuals. The problem must lie elsewhere. Namely, it must lie in a "rule" of unjust, ongoing, unquestioned sexualization of women and victim blaming.

Accusations and defenses were also prevalent across comment sections, although directed at different kinds of (claimed) offenses (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971). Sometimes, accusations took the form of an ongoing offense. At other times, accusations proclaimed that something in the past was a crime. Often, accusations were directed toward a continued wrongdoing by "society," "people," "men," "women," or "feminists," as guilty of upholding offenses:

"@username no no, you see, assault AGAINST men done BY women is not possible in modern society. I want to thank today's feminists for fighting for this 'equality'" (From "Celebrity Kiss"; personal communication, March 5, 2019; my translation).

These comments blame "men" and "feminists" for the existence and silencing of sexual assaults against men and women, respectively,

by presenting their cases as the "real truth." Oftentimes, utterances attempted to establish that something had happened or was happening, as the offensive nature of that "something" was implied to be taken for granted. Defenses were similarly often oriented toward whether something that was happening or had happened was an offense. When defending someone, participants defended someone or something they perceived as being put on "trial" by the creator of the post or other participants in the comment sections. Defenses thus unfolded as claims of innocence or counterattacks as well as trivializations:

> @username She didn't like the picture—she changed it… get over it. The fact that she has young followers is not her fault, and blaming influencers is not taking responsibility as a parent. It is much worse showing your kids that you can criticize and judge what you disagree with or do not like. (personal communication, September 6, 2018; from "The Tent"; my translation)

The example above illustrates comments where the happening itself is not fought over, but rather how to understand what has happened as an offense or not. In the comment, the participant claims that what has happened (specifically, an influencer editing a picture to change their bodily appearance while being a role model to young people) is not a moral offense, as claimed by another speaker. Rather, the other speaker is positioned as morally questionable. The accusations and defenses illuminated the contested views on these topics. As the existence of "wrongdoings" and crimes were not seen as settled matters, neither was a guilty party.

Epideictic Rhetoric: Moral Positionings

Acts of praise and condemnation are inherent features of the epideictic genre (Condit, 1985). Across comment sections (and particularly in "The Tent" post's comment section, with over half of the comments captured), the category "condemnations" reflected moral evaluations and moral stance taking. A participant uttering disgust about the sexualization of girls provides one example:

> "(This is just like) school dress codes. We aren't allowed to show (any) skin because men (see it as) sexual, and we are (forced to) dress for them. Ugh disgusting" (personal communication, May 10, 2017; from "Showing Skin"; sections and details omitted for anonymization purposes).

This comment exemplifies that expressing feelings, in this case disgust, can function as acts of condemnation in epideictic rhetoric (see Andersen, 2020). In the comment above, the speaker implicitly argues not just that the grounds on which men's perception of girls' bodies are incorrect ("men see it as sexual") but positions themselves morally through a strong separation from such views through disgust (Andersen, 2020). This illustrates that epideictic rhetoric can work as a tool to affirm shared values and norms through distinction, simultaneously criticizing others' values or norms (Hauser, 1999).

The praise category was, on the other hand, particularly present in the comment section adhering to the "Showing Skin"-post. Comments in this category captured participants cherishing others. The target of

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appraisal could be either the creator of the post, the post itself, or a participant in the comment section:

> @nameofcreator if anyone can stop women from being discriminated, exploited and raped, and worse, it is YOU! [thumbs up emojis, bicep emojis and smiley face blowing kisses emojis] you have the power and the humor to fight it [smiley face blowing kisses emojis]. (personal communication, May 10, 2017; from "Showing Skin"; my translation, rewritten for anonymization purposes)

In the comment above, the speaker praises the creator for being a promising force in the fight against discrimination, exploitation, and sexual assault, particularly through communicative amplification (seen in emoticons, together with caps lock and exclamation marks; Garver, 2009). As people were frequently proclaimed guilty or innocent of a moral violation through praise and condemnation, features of forensic rhetoric overlapped with features of epideictic rhetoric, exemplifying that genres are often not empirically separable (Garver, 2009). This further illustrates that rhetorical genres are used as analytical tools and that comments may fit variably to each of their respective characteristics; they are put in analytical boxes to better understanding them.

Reciprocity, Justification, and the Deliberative Genre

Occasional attempts at justification and reciprocity were traced in the comment sections. As mentioned, these ideals describe acts of acknowledging and considering other people's arguments before providing arguments in return (reciprocity), which are justified and can

potentially be verified (justification; Wessler & Rinke, 2014). However, the two ideals were mostly concerned with the issue of what was true or what was morally right or appropriate. To this end, they are best understood through the overarching rhetorical genres of epideictic and forensic rhetoric.

Attempts of reciprocity were operationalized generously, including all comments in which a speaker somewhat explicitly considered someone else's argument or viewpoint and gave a statement back (see Wessler & Rinke, 2014). A speaker did not have to, however, explicitly recognize the full depth or extent of another participant's claim:

> "@username Yes, sure. The case is, however, that this person is a public figure, and a role model for many young people. They are contributing to body image pressure if you like it or not" (personal communication, September 6, 2018; from the comment section adhering to "The Tent"; my translation).

The comment above includes acknowledgment of another person's claim ("yes, sure") before presenting new information as a fact ("the case is…"), seemingly ending with a contradiction of the other person's claim ("if you like it or not"). This generous interpretation allowed capturing comments that did not methodically consider or fully write out other people's arguments and are hence best understood as reciprocal attempts and/or nuances. Justifications (especially verifiable ones) are seen to facilitate the accuracy and transparency of views and utterances and, hence, potentially receivers' understandings of positions and arguments (Wessler & Rinke, 2014). In the category named

"potentially verifiable justifications," participants either provided direct routes to their sources, named their sources, wrote that they could send their sources, or provided information that was easily verifiable/refutable (publicly available information). Only the "If I were a boy" post sample had comments fitting into this category. One example of a comment was given by the creator herself, answering a comment addressing the issue of gender privileges:

> "@username women attempt to commit suicide three times as often as men do, but men are responsible for two thirds of the suicides committed in Norway" (personal communication, January 5, 2019; my translation).

In this comment, the creator provides numbers that can be easily verifiable/refutable by looking at publicly available statistics and sources. This comment exemplifies a comment that did not provide or offer to provide a direct source. The deliberative rhetorical genre, on the other hand, operationalized as oriented toward solving issues and future decision making, was detected in only 6% of the data corpus for in-depth analysis. For example, in answer to a statement from another participant concerning gender differences in salary, one participant wrote:

> "@username if you experience getting a different salary than a male colleague, you can report your employer to the correct institution" (personal communication, January 5, 2019; from the comment section adhering to "If I were a boy"; my translation).

In this comment, the participant orients another participant toward a solution to an issue. The comment illustrates, however, that orientations to future problem solving often framed problems as

individual responsibilities (as opposed to structural, in turn in need of societal action). Moreover, orientations to future problem solving often included downplaying matters. Such comments proclaimed that since something was not an issue or offense, the correct way to solve the dispute was simply to "calm down" or "stop caring." To that end, orientations to problem solving, as a minimal requirement, did not capture comments necessarily conducive to social transformations and political change (Andersen, 2012).

Instagram Posts as Context

The slightly different settings for passing judgment or "judicial settings," due to the Instagram posts, may have yielded different patterns on some occasions. The creators played a role in shaping "trials," as their "accused" differed between specific individuals (as representations for larger issues) and less tangible offenders, that is, social structures upheld by the public. The posts may have impacted the distinctive features of the comment-section conversations on three occasions. "The Tent" post deals with the antagonistic behavior of two individuals (the celebrity criticized and the creator himself), which may particularly invite condemnations. Known for pointing out Norwegian influencers' "treacherous behaviors," debates concerning the creator's activities and behaviors have also emerged in the Norwegian public. As opposed to the "Celebrity Kiss" post, where one individual's behavior is explicitly stated in the post's caption as the representation of broader societal

issues, in "The Tent" post, the audience is left to negotiate or fight over such a potential connection, and its meaning, themselves. "The Tent" post may especially invite conversations about morality with two tangible public behaviors as a point of departure (i.e., influencers and the creator). The prominence of the other creator's "Showing Skin" post in the praise category can further be understood by looking to her demonstrative and humorous dancing, her choice of music (by feminist activist Silvana Imam), and her caption, all constituting a kind of feminist online activism. Finally, in the "If I were a boy" post, the creator requests claims based on lived experiences, which may explain the several factual-claim comments. Participants were, however, engaged in discussions about societal issues, guilt and innocence, and immoral views and behaviors across comment sections. These tendencies connecting the material are discussed below.

Discussion

The comments demonstrate theoretical reasoning (Kock, 2018), of which forensic rhetoric in particular outlines characteristics. The domination of forensic rhetoric in public discussions may not just indicate that discussions are concerned with truth and justice, but also reflect a high presence of theoretical reasoning over practical reasoning. That is, that expressions are concerned with what is true, rather than what to do about an issue.

It is of great concern to scholars within the deliberative democratic tradition if people are increasingly disinterested in a common truth. Decisions made based on informed opinions would consequently decline. The comment sections scrutinized in this study, however, prove interest in shared conceptions of reality and facts. Participants responded to and contested each other's truth claims. Convincing others of "the correct truth" mattered, as seen in how participants contested others' claims. To that end, the comment-section participants represent how fears of an enduring truth-uncertainty prompting truth-apathy or truth-relativism (Keane, 2009; Wight, 2018) may be too gloomy (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021). People do not exclusively seek the comfort of like-minded discussions, rely merely on personal experience as truth or relativize truth to an extent where it does not matter (Wight, 2018). As Michailidou and Trenz (2021) argue, there is "resilience of the public sphere" (p. 13479).

One could expect that the comments would take the shape of preference-driven talk "among like- minded individuals" (Jakob et al., 2021, p. 3), as social media enables people to "follow" certain profiles and, and due to platforms' personalization logics (Klinger & Svensson, 2014), both potentially supporting like-mindedness. As the comment sections rather reveal that (active) participants were engaged in "problem-centered" or "issue-driven" (Jakob et al., 2021, pp. 3, 6) debates across opinions and perspectives, fears that social media have become "silos" and that people merely discuss matters of public concern in like-minded arenas online (Habermas, 2009) due to technological

features are also further challenged. Technological features of platforms do not deterministically force fragmentation (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Despite these seemingly uplifting findings, the ontological contests that the comments demonstrate indicate that the comment sections are best understood as places for a particular kind of societal conversation.

Epideictic and Forensic Entanglement: A Breeding Ground for Clashing Truths?

The rhetorical genres of the forensic and the epideictic delineate that the discussions revolve around truth, justice, and morality, or in other words, how things are and how things should be. The state of justice and appropriateness were inherent in the discussions. Despite the lack of truth-apathy/relativism and like- mindedly-confined discussion, an explicit cooperative negotiation of truth was missing. In the comment section, participants were oriented toward convincing others of the truth of a public issue or incident. They took on roles as providers of "objective facts" (e.g., Palczewski, 2005, p. 128) but were seemingly not open to acknowledging or reflecting on different truth claims or changing their own minds (Cohen, 2009). Utterances were rather largely expressed to demonstrate that others had made false truth claims; "truths" were clashing. While contradicting truth-relativism and -apathy (Keane, 2009; Wight, 2018), which can describe the lack of belief in the existence of one truth or a lack of belief that truth matters, the debates may reflect

truth uncertainty in public life (Keane, 2009). The latter can be described as a lack of shared and taken-for-granted truths. Considering why epideictic and forensic rhetoric may be present in public conversations and the functions of their entanglement may help explain these tendencies.

When speakers proclaim what is true, as in forensic rhetoric, ontological contests are invited. The ontological contests demonstrated in this study further show the role of the forensic genre through participants' orientation to setting straight realities of (in)justice (Evans, 2021; Harris & Werner, 2021). Participants, for example, proclaimed that something had in fact happened as proof that something was (in)just or that someone should be accused or defended of something (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971). Offenses were placed in the hands of influencers, other participants in the comment sections, the creator of the post in question, a group in society (for example, "men," "feminists"), or society entirely ("people," "we"). This illuminates attempts at responsibility attributions necessary to make problems concrete and create pathways to justice (Harris & Werner, 2021). The need to establish guilt is especially pertinent in questions of social change because "assigning guilt provides a connection between the problem and agency" (Harris & Werner, 2021, p. 630). Epideictic rhetoric, however, seen, for instance, in participants' praising or condemning each other (Condit, 1985; Hauser, 1999), may uphold and sustain such ontological contests by strengthening diverging positions. Finding more epideictic rhetoric in public conversations indicates finding more moral positioning (see

Andersen, 2020; Vatnøy, 2017). That is, placing others and/or self according to morality. While genres are thus delineated conceptually, they are often empirically tied in the comment sections. For example, orientations to truth were closely tied to attempts to position someone or something as violating (or reinforcing harmful) norms, customs, rules, and values. Here, the forensic genre appears in its orientation to truth and attempts to prescribe guilt for a violation, while the epideictic genre is present through condemning and morally positioning others (Andersen, 2020) for conducting, supporting, or overlooking the violation in question.

The comment sections may illustrate that when injustices prevail due to not being sufficiently recognized in a public, guilty parties may be confined to people's views and customs, inviting an empirical entanglement of epideictic and forensic rhetoric. When people do not acknowledge claims that a violation has been committed, they may be blamed for upholding or disregarding injustice and thus be morally positioned through condemnation. To move toward a solution to an issue of injustice, disagreeing parties need to agree that a problem exists, on its facts, and to its extent. The lack of orientation toward future action in the comment sections makes sense, considering the diverging perceptions of what the facts were, concerning what had happened in the past, or what was continuously (not) happening. As the public issues discussed in the comment sections pertained to social (in)justice that was still in need of others' recognition, an orientation toward future decision making and a public debate in the views of Habermas (1981/1984) would

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be premature. While the comments are concerned with truth, disproving truth-relativism, they remain proclamations.

Transcending From Ontological Contest

To the ontological contests of this study, the question remains about the state of democratic listening (see Wessler, 2018), something beyond what this study can allude to. In general, without democratic listening, the public sphere could become a place of proclamations of several versions of truth, resulting in "polarization of different 'trust communities' that diverge in how they interpret the value of information" (Michailidou & Trenz, 2021, p. 1346). If people were to never transcend and move forward from a stage of ontological contest as shown in this study, through finding common ground on the existence or reality of public issues, public conversations would have a hard time moving away from a display of opinions where people rather than considering arguments cheered on the side they belonged to (Andersen, 2020).

This illustrates the point that reciprocity and justification matter to theoretical reasoning from a deliberative democratic perspective. One may come closer to a shared truth through their presence in discussions. It is an ideal of the deliberative democratic tradition that people share assumptions about the world and what they regard as true to agree on their shared situation (Habermas, 1981/1984), before starting or continuing deliberation. This does not mean that deliberation in an

Aristotelian sense (i.e., weighing different reasons in discussion about future action or decision making) does not occur empirically without truth consensus. Rather, the point is that it is valuable to the democratic quality of discussions that people have similar conceptions of reality and facts. This is also the stage that needs to be passed in order for injustices to be recognized (Harris & Werner, 2021) and for opposing positions to be fruitful in a democratic deliberative sense, as it can make positions clear (Jakob et al., 2021). Proclamations can be fruitful in distinguishing and clarifying disagreeing parties, but agreement that a problem exists needs to be sought before this stage.

Scholars have demonstrated the presence of epideictic rhetoric in online public conversations, explaining it as partly resulting from the inherent features of social media platforms (Andersen, 2020; Vatnøy, 2017). Blurred boundaries between what is public and what is private may invite conversations where 'the personal' is focused on and employed, and that concern issues that "involve reflections on the social norms and values that form the basis for social life" (Vatnøy, 2017, p. 68). These are issues where people can easily form an opinion and draw on personal experiences and their sense of what is right or wrong. In these circumstances, when discussing "what is true" (Kock, 2018), contradicting information may be challenging to consider (Festinger, 1962). Negotiating one's conception of what is true, especially when issues pertain to "social norms and values" (Vatnøy, 2017, p. 68), may require more effort and self-examination than negotiating one's views on already established public matters. When discussions concern what is

true, a prevalence of moral positioning of discussion participants (as may be particularly invited on social media; Andersen, 2020; Vatnøy, 2017), may prevent cooperative theoretical reasonings (Kock, 2018), that is, where people aim for a shared understanding about reality. Furthermore, as the logics of social media emphasize not just the personal but movement of content (e.g., Klinger & Svensson, 2014), social media may not facilitate that people follow conversations as they develop. It is here, then, that the most vital role of social media platforms in theoretical discussions and conversations regarding what is true may be shown. To be clear, I do not suggest that the simultaneous presence of epideictic and forensic rhetoric would necessarily impede deliberative rhetoric in all instances. Rather, they together pose challenges to resolve tensions and bridge understandings, as they may not invite reciprocity. In forensic rhetoric, for example, speakers typically present themselves as objective spokespersons and providers of evidence for "the one truth" (Palczewski, 2005). The genre invites proclamations. As has been pointed out, epideictic rhetoric has been shown to unfold as the moral positioning of others and selves between conversations' participants on social media (Andersen, 2020). The genre may thus strengthen opposition between such "others" and "selves" (Condit, 1985). Although forensic rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric do not necessarily impede deliberative rhetoric simply by their existence in conversations, they represent challenges to reciprocity, perhaps especially when occurring in conversations on social media platforms.

While scholars have long used deliberative rhetorical lenses when investigating public discussions (e.g., Gastil & Levine, 2005), and in later years have also increasingly recognized the value of employing epideictic lenses (e.g., Andersen, 2020), forensic rhetoric has been given less attention. It is still considered "an under-theorized vehicle" in public communication (Harris & Werner, 2021, p. 619). As the participants grappled with contested realities in public matters related to social injustices upheld by (largely unquestioned) social structures, forensic rhetoric also demonstrates its relevance outside formal legal contexts (Pâquet, 2018). Identifying ontological contests entailing moral positionings in the comment sections, this study contends not just that epideictic rhetoric, but also forensic rhetoric may emerge in contemporary online conversations. This study also reflects, however, that forensic rhetoric does not necessarily resolve the tensions that may spark its presence—disagreements about truth and (in)justice— by establishing agreement, especially when combined with epideictic rhetoric.

While relying on a small sample of comments drawn from four comment sections, this study illuminates an increased demand for justice that emerges simultaneously as there are challenging circumstances for shared realities and facts in the Western world (Ambrosio, 2022). The urgency to identify and understand the circumstances in which irreconcilability of truth positions emerge and prevail, where condemning "the other" for morale violations is inherent, is, for example,

evidenced in the overturning of the Roe v. Wade court decision by the Supreme Court in the United States as of June 24, 2022.

This study demonstrates that combining rhetorical genres as theoretical lenses provides useful tools for understanding communicative circumstances and functions. The approach used in this paper facilitates more closely capturing and understanding the range of communication forms that are relevant to society's public conversations (Wessler, 2018; Young, 2002), while being open and sensitive to how they appear empirically as possibly entangled, imperfect, and "incomplete" (Fishkin, 1995). In particular, it shows that forensic rhetoric is useful for capturing the presence and shape of expressions that are concerned with what is true, as opposed to expressions that are concerned with what to do about an issue. It enables the tracing of the shapes and functions that theoretical reasoning takes (Kock, 2018).

Limitations

Some comments were not included in this analysis (n = 178), as I did not export comments from "private" users or comments adhering to shut-down or deleted profiles. Furthermore, the ways in which content travels on social media likely made the four Instagram posts reach certain individuals. Rationales for distributing content for maximum exposure and attention likely make certain content (more easily) available to specific users (Klinger & Svensson, 2014), hence impacting the conversations in the comment sections. The Instagram posts' audience

and active participants may represent more than what this study can inquire about also due to who uses Instagram and for what purposes. This study does not evaluate why people engage in online discussions or who participates and what motivates them. What is witnessed in this study is simply visible traces of social interaction. To that end, as this study does not aim for quantitative representativeness, the findings do not represent Instagram conversations about public matters at large.

Conclusion

This study identifies the presence of the forensic rhetorical genre in online discussions, highlighting a genre generally overlooked beyond court-of-law settings. Furthermore, it demonstrates the presence of forensic and epideictic rhetoric on Instagram, which is a scarcely examined platform with regard to public conversations. The conversations can be understood as theoretical reasonings in which ontological contests entailing moral positionings dominate, revolving around truth, justice, and evaluations of the appropriateness of views and behaviors. As an analytical tool, the forensic genre helps reveal intricacies of public conversations where ontological contests—that is, disputes about what is true—are prevalent. This is demonstrated in this study, where such intricacies manifest particularly as guilt being prescribed to people's views and customs when (in)justice is seen as not sufficiently recognized by others.

Although the comments contradict concerns of truth-relativism and truth-apathy, they simultaneously illustrate proclamations of truth rather than conversations traditionally considered fruitful to deliberative democratic publics. Forensic and epideictic rhetoric may, when overlapping, work to uphold contradictory opinions and views rather than to bridge understandings. One's "truth" and worldview, and hence justice claims, may be framed and understood as part of one's persona. "Others" may be alienated, and similarly minded people may be "cherished" (Andersen, 2020). This may be especially true in online environments, where boundaries are blurred between one's opinion and self (Vatnøy, 2017). This article shows the potential of combining the three rhetorical genres as theoretical lenses when studying online communication. It may help pinpoint what rhetorical configurations contribute to preventing people from reaching common truths and grounds. Such matters are crucial to future research, given that political polarization and diverging reality conceptions continue to be a worry to both citizens and scholars.

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Article 2

Social Media Natives' Invisible Online Spaces: Proposing the Concept of Digital Gemeinschaft 2.0

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This study proposes the concept of "digital Gemeinschaft 2.0," through examining Rich Ling's employment of Ferdinand Tönnies' Gesellschaft (market society) and Gemeinschaft (fellowship), when conceptualizing the "digital Gemeinschaft." Drawing on 11 in-depth interviews with social media natives in Norway, it identifies three recurring themes, reflecting (1) a Gesellschaft attentiveness, (2) continued Gemeinschaft, with occasional public orientations, and (3) information gathering and learning without direct public partaking. This study emphasizes social media natives' utilization of social media for maintaining social relationships through an active negotiation and construction of space. A continuous attentiveness to social space is connected to features of Gesellschaft in social media: the utilization of people's data traces for economic purposes. The social media natives' online activities are still tied to the market rationales of social media corporations, however, as platforms both facilitate and profit from their practices. The digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 concept hence highlights a continued tension between Gesellschaft and digital Gemeinschaft in social media as both medium and (social and public) space.

Keywords: *social media usage, communication privacy management, online spaces, opinion formation, social relationships*

Introduction

The term "web 2.0" has long described the online world as a place for people's communication and community building (Fuchs, 2011, p. 288). Social media platforms have largely been developed for economic rather than social capital, how- ever, under guise of connecting people and their communities (Gillespie, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; van Dijck, 2013, p. 16). Platforms are dependent upon advertising, in turn shaping their design (Gillespie, 2018), and strategies for attention maximizing and data collection (Flensburg & Lai, 2022). As prominent social media platforms are steered by profit rationales, reflected in emphases on virality and popularity (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), concerns have been raised that these rationales invade social life (see, for example, van Dijck & Poell, 2013, pp. 10–11). Scholars contend that social media's profit incentives' long overdue prominence should pose immediate calls for policies (Hwang, 2020). Despite privacy concerns connected to social media companies' treatment of people's data (Jensen & Helles, 2017, p. 34), people continue using social media (Demertzis et al., 2021), accepting reduced privacy (Fulton & Kibby, 2017, p. 197), or adopting protective strategies (Artieri et al., 2021). Social media are particularly embedded in young people's social life (Boyd, 2008; Moe & Bjørgan, 2021). Easily reached through the smartphone, social media have become prominent to their day-to-day connection with others (e.g., Chambers, 2013; Vorderer et al., 2017), often to sustain their "offline" relationships (Kalogeropoulos, 2021; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). While age is not a stand-alone explanation for social media use (Lu & Hampton,

2017), familiarity with technology is partly shaped by a person's generational status (Fang et al., 2019) and previous media experiences (LaRose et al., 2001). Asking "how do social media natives use social media as social and public spaces?," this study provides a case of how young people in Norway, accustomed to online/ offline entangled social life, use contemporary social media.

People use different platforms for different purposes (González-González et al., 2022; Karahanna et al., 2018; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). While some scholars have investigated social media usage with a Goffmanian[37] focus (Hogan, 2010), intrigued by the unparalleled possibilities of controlling online self-presentation, others have highlighted the challenges social media pose in terms of managing one's audience and social context (Papacharissi, 2010). Platforms afford distinct combinations of weak and strong ties (Goyanes et al., 2021), affecting how people perceive and deal with potential audiences (e.g., Lu & Hampton, 2017; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). The ways in which social media are used are inextricably tied to the techno-economic aspects of platforms (Helmond, 2015; van Dijck, 2009, p. 55). While people's practices have also shaped social media developments (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), platforms inevitably steer people's online interactions as they by design continuously (dis)courage certain connections and activities (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 11).

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[37] According to Goffman (1959), people always engage in self-performance practices, to create a preferred self-presentation when being in front of (different) "audiences" (see, for example, Goffman, 1959, p. 13).

To investigate this relationship between social life and economic incentives, I mobilize the concepts of Gemeinschaft (fellowship) and Gesellschaft (market society) (Tönnies, 1887/2001). Here, Gesellschaft can be said to reflect the instrumental logics underlying corporate social media, shaping the utilization of people's data and social life. Reversely, Gemeinschaft emphasizes close relationships and agentic social life. Although scholars have advanced concepts, such as "private publics," to understand the array of social spaces and practices evolving in digital society (Papacharissi, 2010, 2014), the concept of digital Gemeinschaft is scarcely examined beyond cars and mobile phone use (Bautista, 2019; Bautista et al., 2020; Boase, 2021; Ling, 2012) and mobile- based banking (Komen & Ling, 2021).[38] The economic aspects of social media, as opposed to people's socialization, are not explicitly captured by such previous terms. Tönnies' dichotomy, however, explicitly demands emphasizing profit-incentives versus people's urge for interpersonal communication. A concept of "digital Gemeinschaft" (Ling, 2012) fit to contemporary circumstances should thus be especially equipped for understanding people's use of for-profit plat- forms for upholding close relationships. Market rationales have entered not just public life (Papacharissi, 2010), but the private realm (see, for example, van Dijck, 2009).

Given the increased prominence of for-profit social media platforms to people's social interactions (Newman et al., 2020; Skogerbø

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[38] One exception is Battin (2020), tying the term to also apply in relations between micro-celebrities and their audiences on Instagram

& Karlsen, 2021, p. 102), questions remain as to how social media natives use social media as communicative spaces.[39] Drawing on conversations with 11 young people in Norway, this article proposes the concept of digital Gemeinschaft 2.0. Digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 extends Rich Ling's concept of "digital Gemeinschaft" to current social media environments. The concept emphasizes that for-profit social media are not just commercially incentivized transmit- ting technologies, but providers of social space. In the following, I will outline relevant theory before introducing material and methods used in this study. Then, the analysis will be presented, followed by a discussion where the concept of digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 is introduced.

Theoretical Framework

Ferdinand Tönnies' (1887/2001) terms, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, are renowned for conceptualizing stark contrasts between traditional and industrialized society. To Tönnies, Gemeinschaft described the traditional society and its emphasis on community and personal relationships. This represented the familiar, comfortable, and most genuine to human life (Tönnies, 1887/2001, p. 19). Gesellschaft, how-ever, conceptualized the market-oriented society with its rationalization and commodification, prompting individualistic calculations, detachment, and self-interest (Tönnies, 1887/2001, pp. 52–53).

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[39] For a more comprehensive analysis of conceptions of space and place in digital circumstances, see Özkul (2013).

Gesellschaft's rationales were transgressing into social life, increasingly replacing and damaging Gemeinschaft. One central worry to Tönnies was the detrimental consequences Gesellschaft rationales brought to the press' normative function in public life (e.g., Tönnies, 1922, pp. 190–191). To Tönnies, it was imperative that the press was not steered by economic incentives and concerns, as it held a pivotal role as a mediator of relevant and truthful information and political opinions. In market-oriented circumstances, citizens evaluated published expressions and opinions to engage in distorted public opinion formation (Tönnies, 1922, pp. 98–99).[40] An idealized "public opinion" was hence manufactured and commodified by organized powers and self-interests while disguised as "an allegedly common interest" (Keane, 1982, p. 14). While Tönnies saw the rise of the modern concept of public opinion and Gesellschaft's intrusion as inextricably tied, his concerns that a profit-oriented press would not properly nourish crucial public sphere functions (Tönnies, 1922, pp. 179–180) have been a major worry also to scholars valuing public discourse (Habermas, 1989, 1992; see also Benhabib, 1996). In the deliberative democratic tradition, deliberation must be "free and unconstrained" to contribute to democratic legitimacy (Benhabib, 1996, p. 68). Jürgen Habermas' dichotomy of system and lifeworld, resembling aspects of Tönnies' Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft,[41] for example,

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[40] See Arnold (2007) for a more comprehensive account of Tönnies' notion of public opinion

[41] While Habermas' "system" contains the state and the economy, the "lifeworld" entails the private sphere (holding intimate, close and communal relationships) and the public sphere (the life of the citizen) (Whipple, 2005, p. 167). In fact, noting the resemblance, Ling (2014, p. 8) suggested that people repurposing technologies made in capitalist rationales for their personal relationships was evidence that the "lifeworld"

continued raising concerns about the destructive consequences of capital rationalizations of the media. In Habermas' view, the public sphere should not be "an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling" (Fraser, 1992, p. 57). To the deliberative tradition, then, political life and the construction of a public opinion are inauthentic and distorted if they are not free and unconstrained. The public sphere is not contrasted to genuine human life and inherent to market rationales, although it may be taken advantage of and intruded by such rationales.

Over a hundred years after Tönnies' first introduction of the conceptual tools, Rich Ling (2014) introduced the concept "digital Gemeinschaft." He specifically employed Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft to show that people repurpose technologies, developed in and through market rationales, to uphold community and closeness with others. Exemplifying this by the car and the mobile phone, he points to the self-determination of humans, employing technology for their social needs (Ling, 2014, p. 8). Ling specifically advocates that Tönnies' conviction of an inescapable take-over by Gesellschaft was too fixed and static. Simultaneously, Ling emphasizes a continuous tension between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, and the latter's continued power. This study examines the notion that people are continuously utilizing technology developed in Gesellschaft rationales for Gemeinschaft purposes (Ling, 2014). Gesellschaft rationales underlying emerging

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was in fact not taken over by the "system" (as stated by Habermas, 1987). See, also, Bessant (2016, p. 72).

online social spaces necessitate a continuous attentiveness to social space for the Norwegian social media natives of this study when maintaining a digital Gemeinschaft. I conceptualize Ling's digital Gemeinschaft to work beyond technologies "that mediate sociation" (Ling, 2014, p. 14), to social media technologies that construct social and public space. Simultaneously, I demonstrate the need to circle back to Tönnies' nuances of possibilities of Gemeinschaft practices within Gesellschaft circumstances (Asplund, 1991) to conceptualize the dynamic relationship between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in digital society.

Material and Methods

I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with young adults in Norway, termed "social media natives" due to their age and upbringing in one of the world's most digital countries (Brandtzæg, 2016; Digital Economy and Society Index [DESI], 2021). The Internet is prominent to public communication, news, and politics in Norway (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021), a country considered safe and democratic (Global Peace Index, 2021), where freedom of expression is highly satisfied (Nielsen et al., 2019). Aged between 19 and 29 years old, the interviewees had had large parts of their youth, or the entirety of their youth, with the smartphone and social media as ingrained tools in social and public life. Participants were recruited through emails going out to students at a Norwegian university. Six women and five men were chosen for inter- views. The individuals were invited to participate until theoretical saturation was

achieved, the first interview held January 2020, the last February 2021. From mid-March to mid-December 2020, no interviews were held due to Norwegian Covid-19 restrictions. Toward the end, talking to new participants showed no new revelations with regard to this study's research aim (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The participants were picked based on age and in an aim for gender balance (only gender categories of "women" and "men" signed up). Choosing this specific sampling of individuals allowed for an in-depth investigation into accustomed experiences with social media. The interviewees were all White (Fang et al., 2019) Europeans (10 Norwegian and 1 born in another European country).

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hr each. The loose time frame of the interviews allowed for stories and elaborations, and sensitivity to the interviewees' different ways of elaborating. During the inter- views, I took inspiration from photo elicitation technique for similar purposes (Harper, 2002). Photo elicitation technique entails using images in the interview setting, to evoke emotions and memories that words alone are less equipped for reaching in an interview setting (Harper, 2002, p. 13). I used Instagram posts published by public figures in the Norwegian public, as well as made up examples of comment sections adhering to some of these posts. Interviews were conducted, transcribed (16 hr and 35 min of data), and analyzed in Norwegian. Quotations mobilized as examples in this text are translated by the author, and reliability is tested by a Norwegian-speaking colleague of the author translating the same sections of the

interviews, resulting in agreement that the quotes' meaning is captured as they are depicted in this article. All participants are anonymized, given pseudonyms, and all identifiable information is removed.

The data from in-depth interviews are of a semi-natural setting kind. The interview-situation is not a natural setting and must be acknowledged as a form of meaning-making in itself. As the conversations were not meant to reflect every individual's experience and meaning-making, but rather pro- vide material for understanding the use of current emerging digital social spaces more in-depth, the participants needed not to be representative of a population. This study does not try to apply any effects observed in the research setting beyond that setting, but aims for theory application, where observations "in the research (can be) employed to assess the status of theory" (Calder et al., 1981, p. 197). The interviews were qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as this allowed for detecting main themes across the interviews. A theme was constructed based on two criteria: that it was a "repeated pattern of meaning" across the data set, and that it captured "something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 82, 86). To that end, themes were carved out as particularly relevant to the research question. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84), such analyses provide "a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data." Three key themes (see Figure 1) stood out as particularly relevant to the task at hand, namely, answering the research question concerning how social media natives use social media as social and public spaces.

Digital Gemeinschaft Within Gesellschaft

Three key themes could be identified in the interviews: (1) a reluctance to participate in anything considered an "open" and hence unsafe space online, (2) an ongoing carving out of "closed" spaces for the purpose of safe socialization, and (3) learning and information gathering. As will be shown, this first theme reflects a Gesellschaft attentiveness, while the second reflects continued Gemeinschaft, with occasional public orientations. The third theme demonstrates social media as arenas for citizens' learning and information gathering. As shown by Figure 1, the Gesellschaft attentiveness surrounds the two others.
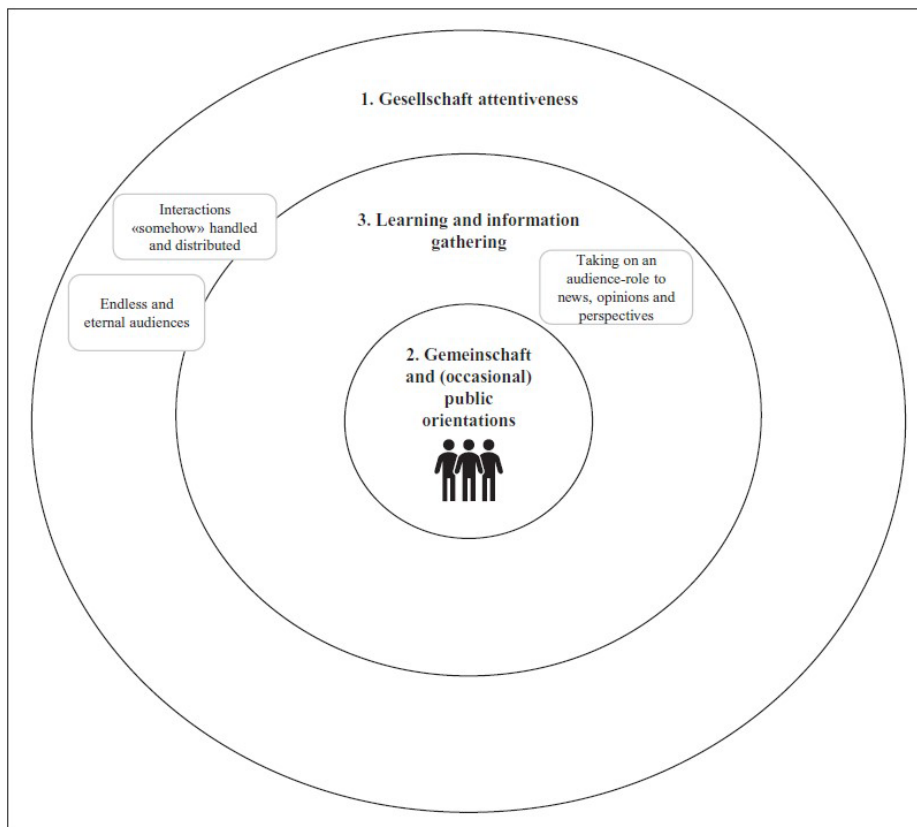
Figure 1. Participants' use of social media: themes emanating from the analysis

Gesellschaft Attentiveness

Interviewees were reluctant to leave any visible trace in "open spaces" as they could not be sure where or when their online interactions could end up. Any space that was not "created" by themselves or someone they knew—with the help of the affordances within platforms (Karahanna et al., 2018; van Dijck, 2009, p. 55)—was considered open. As such, only spaces created by invitation-only-access, through features such as Facebook's Messenger function or Instagram's direct messaging (DM) function, were considered closed and safe. Posting something on Facebook or Instagram, outside of Messenger or the DM function, was considered posting something for a potentially endless audience. As explained by "Emerson" when elaborating on why they preferred not posting anything in spaces of "publicness" online,

> When something is written it is there forever, it exists eh . . . like. What is it called? Mark tags. Of everything that is written and publicized on the internet. That you can find, very easily, not difficult. And there, all of that is there for eternity.

"Emerson" referred to spaces such as Facebook when describing spaces of "publicness" online. Facebook is one example of a social media that provides a variety of close and weak social ties, shown to contribute to selective avoidance and filtering mechanisms (Goyanes et al., 2021). Interviewees frequently circled back to an uncertainty and a lack of control as given features of such online "open" spaces. While the

underlying distributive processes of social media were spoken about as a given, the interviewees were highly attentive to these processes' potential effects. Their elaborations rendered that they envisioned their interactions online as naturally somehow handled in ways possibly leading to unintentional, unwanted consequences. Although algorithms and privacy matters were rarely mentioned explicitly by the interviewees, they showed a high attentiveness to the logic of social media (see, for example, Klinger & Svensson, 2015), where they did not own or control their interactions once it was "let loose" in virality, longevity, and maximum exposure rationales. Some of the interviewees, for example, told "horror stories" of other people's mistakes online, leading to unintentional distribution of their expressions and interactions. One told the story of a woman which—to her surprise and agony—blew up on Twitter during her flight from New York to South Africa due to what was an intended joke about AIDS (see Ronson, 2015). According to the participant, this was just one example of how your interactions and expressions could suddenly travel to unforeseen and unintended audiences, and the aftermath proved that you could never really scrape what you had posted in "open spaces" off the Internet. The social media natives were in other words not only accustomed, but highly attentive to social media as technologies of Gesellschaft (Ling, 2014, p. 8). Social media's utilization of people's interactions was a taken-for- granted "truth" of the online world. This first theme, then, reflects a Gesellschaft attentiveness.

Continued Gemeinschaft and Occasional Public Orientations

Despite their hesitations and attentive evaluations, the social media natives remained present online. Most were even highly active and used social media frequently throughout the day. They utilized social media for keeping in touch with friends and family in spaces they regarded as closed off from such above-mentioned uncertainties. Frequent spaces mentioned were Facebook's messenger function, Instagram's DM function, and Snapchat. These spaces allowed them to create boundaries and thereby certain audiences of strong ties (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017), through by-invitation-only access. For example, when elaborating on their interactions with friends and staying up to date on local news, "Arn" explained that they and their friends had created a private chat on Instagram, named after the local meeting-spot where "Arn"'s grandfather met his friends to talk about current affairs in the local community. For anonymization purposes, I refer to this group as "Slaje" (a dialectal short version of the name of the local grocery shop with adhering cafè in my own childhood hometown). The group was created in the "DM" function. Enabled by this function within Instagram, this group could neither be seen nor entered unless invited. Using this feature enabled preventing the possibility of a collapse of social contexts (Papacharissi, 2010; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). Here, "Arn" and their friends frequently discussed news and current affairs:

> My grandfather goes to something called "(Slaje)." Every Saturday, they meet down at the mall, the old pensioners. And then they talk

about what is going on in the local community. So, we kind of just created the same.

In this group, "Arn" further explained, they could send each other links to online news articles and ask each other about things happening in the local and regional community. There was no need for self-censorship (see Velasquez & Rojas, 2017, p. 4) as boundaries were static. Similarly, "Kersten" had a private group on Snapchat for staying in touch with friends throughout the day where conversations often got political:

I use story function on Snapchat, there I have a private one, but it's kind of also for internal stuff eh its closed so I use it for posting kind of . . . internal stuff if something happened throughout the day or if I just . . . have something to say [. . .]

Is there sometimes something political there?

Yes its very often something political (laughter)

Yes?

A lot of it is that (political) . . . and then I have a lot who disagrees with me, a lot that disagrees, so it's always funny to see what, what kind of response I get . . . But when it comes to things like Facebook, that's like, so open, and I don't know . . .

Some of the social media natives also constructed temporary "spaces" for people they did not have close relationships to, like friends of friends and acquaintances. This was often done using different "story" functions on Snapchat or Instagram. As explained by "Ask," who only used it for social issue reposting,

The only thing I share usually in the story there (on Instagram) is pictures from Amnesty. If it's some important cause and stuff like that, then I post it there.

"Kersten" illuminated different perceptions of public/private nuances (Papacharissi, 2010) when elaborating on their use of Messenger versus Snapchat:

> I use Snapchat, but then I just use it to talk to close friends [. . .] I just use it for the closest ones, like, my partner and . . . people that have moved and studies other places I talk a lot to also

> If I am to write something formal, I write an email. But if it's more informal, I'll write it on Messenger. If it's really informal, I write it on Snapchat. [. . .] Messenger I can use for everyone that I know.

"Kersten" exemplifies that different social media meet different kinds of needs, depending on their action possibilities (Karahanna et al., 2018). It was interesting to note that in the beginning of my conversation with "Kersten," they did not mention Snapchat as a prominent social media, but later emphasized it as the outmost important platform for their close social interactions and a central part of their daily online practices. To "Kersten," being asked about the "most important social media" did not invite mentioning Snapchat because Snapchat was simply "just used for talking to close friends." In other words, it did not fit into the same category as Facebook and Instagram. Similarly, most interviewees (except for one) mentioned Snapchat as one of the most important social media, as it was the most informal and closed-off platform. Snapchat may be seen the most socially manageable social media by the participants as it facilitates strong ties and has no "feed" where anyone can lurk on one's content without one's knowledge. It enables only communicating with preselected close relationships (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017, p. 4), where messages vanish quickly after being opened by

recipients. Little traces are left, and certain audiences are met. Snapchat affords the needs (Karahanna et al., 2018, p. 739) sought covered by the participants, namely, interpersonal communication without the potential dangers of losing control in spaces where a logic of virality reigns (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The second theme, an ongoing carving out of "closed" spaces for the purpose of safe socialization, is thus a reflection of a continued Gemeinschaft.

Leaning and Information Gathering

The social media natives all utilized social media for learn- ing, staying updated on, understanding, or making up their minds about news and public issues. For example, "Quinn" explained that although they would never post anything of meaning in a comment section (they could post "@" fol- lowed by someone's username to tag someone, making them aware of the content), they sometimes looked to comment sections to gain understanding of an issue or a dispute, or to see where people positioned themselves. Similarly, "Finley" explained,

> I always scroll (in comment sections) because, either to see . . . kind of, whom people mostly agree with, or if there are any comments that are funny or well written or. People that write, things I think is just nonsense.

Before remembering Snapchat, "Kersten" named Facebook's Messenger function as the outmost important part of Facebook, along with Facebook's "newsfeed" function, giving them a range of different

sources for information, news, and opinions as they followed different news sources (e.g., González-González et al., 2022). While the social media natives for the most part explained using social media to stay in touch with their close relationships, they also used it for information gathering and evaluations through news and other people's posts or discussions. The third theme is hence: learning and information gathering. "Emerson" was one of the few interviewees that occasionally did participate in discussions online outside of closed-off spaces:

> I discuss a little bit on Reddit . . . Eh. But then I'm literary meaning a little bit. I have thr, four, things I comment on a month. [. . .] Eh, but when I'm on Reddit its mostly, news reading.

Reddit is a social media platform that particularly invites and affords anonymity (K. E. Anderson, 2015; Karahanna et al., 2018, p. A22). "Emerson" hence left no visible foot- prints connected to their offline selves to other social media users when participating in "open" spaces, and otherwise, similar to the other participants, used such spaces mainly for information and learning.

Discussion

The social media natives of this study use social media developed in rationales of capitalism (Flensburg & Lai, 2022; Klinger & Svensson, 2015) to maintain Gemeinschaft (Ling, 2014), that is, personal relationships and community (Tönnies, 1887/2001, p. 19). They carve out spaces that they perceive private and safe, circumventing the

potential of losing track and control of their data traces. As the social media natives evaluate how to best protect their interactions from traveling in unforeseen ways or to unintended audiences, they demonstrate a "reflexive awareness of Gesellschaft" (Boase, 2021) pertaining to features within (social media) applications. In Ling's (2014, p. 14) conceptualization of digital Gemeinschaft, the mobile phone and the car are emphasized as "technologies that mediate sociation." Alongside these are "social networking sites" positioned as one of many ways in which people "carry out social interaction" (Ling, 2014, p. 12). What the social media natives in this study illustrate, however, is that social media are not just incorporated mediating technologies allowing us to communicate and coordinate our lives with others. Platforms provide arenas for public and social life. The term digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 (see Figure 2) draws on the "web 2.0" term's emphasis on the online world as a place for community and sharing between individuals (Fuchs, 2011). The use of "2.0" points to the role of social media as spaces, not just as distributors and transmitters.

I propose "digital Gemeinschaft 2.0" as a useful concept as it recognizes and follows the development of social media as both (1) a technology equipped for socialization processes (as in Ling's digital Gemeinschaft concept, mid-column of Figure 2) and (2) a provider of social space (right column). Market forces and market rationales are constructed as circles imposing on the digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 to highlight not just that the technology as commodity is developed for economic profit, but that the space is continuously shaped by for-profit incentives.

According to Ling (2014), the "very technologies that serve the purpose of capitalism are often reconceptualized to afford the needs of individuals and their social spheres" (p. 8). The social media natives' online practices are, however, simultaneously afforded by the social media platforms (see, for example, Gillespie, 2018, p. 19; van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 9). They serve the political-economic interests of social media corporations (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Giving people the option to participate in isolated groups, when seeing people's interest in such practices, is economically profitable because people's presence and activity "add business value," beyond their content creation (van Dijck, 2009, pp. 4546).
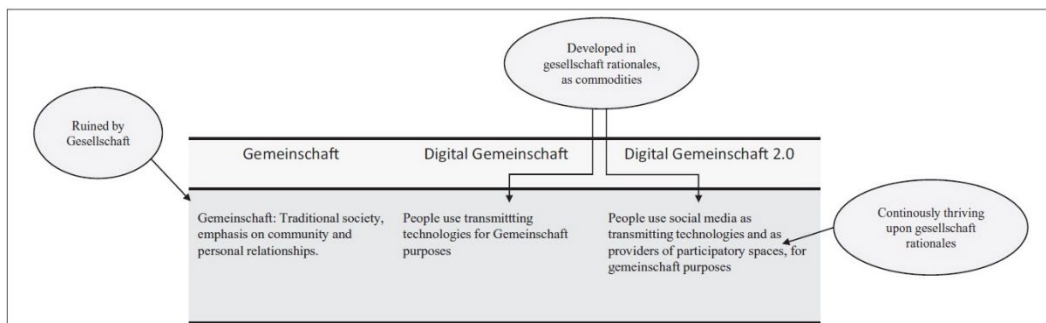
Figure 2. From Gemeinschaft and Digital Gemeinschaft toward Digital Gemeinschaft 2.0.

To that end, the social media natives do not "reconceptualize" the technology. They rather accept platforms' architecture and "coded abilities" (Helmond, 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; van Dijck, 2009, p. 45). Not only do people use technology made in Gesellschaft rationales,

as "tools of industry and commerce," to maintain community and personal relation- ships, then (Ling, 2014, p. 8). Platforms are developed in line with market incentives, under the disguise of being for people's relationships and community building (van Dijck, 2009, 2013). Social media corporations appropriate the language of Gemeinschaft. Corporations thus purpose technology developed in the name of Gemeinschaft, for Gesellschaft purposes.

Tönnies warned against the development of the 19th- century press becoming "a large capitalist business whose direct and main goal is to create profit in management" (Splichal, 2007, p. 246). Scholars critical to profit-seeking social media would likely not disagree that current profit- seeking social media fit that description. Circling back to Tönnies enables recognizing the impact of the logics of the market (Tönnies, 1887/2001, pp. 52–53) on social media as spaces, mediating technologies between individuals (Ling, 2014, p. 12), and as mediators of news, public information, and perspectives (Tönnies, 1922). As seen in the model above, social media are not just single commodities built upon market rationales. They are communicative spaces continuously thriving upon such logics when handling and distributing actor's interactions (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The analysis shows that these logics are what necessitates a continuous attentiveness to space for the social media natives of this study. When socializing with close relation- ships on social media, they carve out spaces carefully with attentiveness to the Gesellschaft rationales steering how information travels.

Inherent to Tönnies' concerns related to the media and public life is the control capital forces gain on behalf of people's genuinely comfortable and close coexistence. Although Tönnies is often read as uncompromising in his dichotomy between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, and the features connected to each life form, one may in his later additions to the traditional work of 1887 find that he was occasionally more nuanced and open to Gemeinschaft attempts and functions within the frame of Gesellschaft (see Asplund, 1991, p. 65). What was crucial was that such practices did not succumb to commerce but resisted it. While the social media natives do not resist social media altogether, illustrating its vast and integrated role in Norwegian society, they attempt to resist its logics, especially prevalent and noticeable outside of "closed" spaces. They demonstrate that people living in Gesellschaft circumstances may engage in Gemeinschaft-like practices (Asplund, 1991, p. 65).

Social media lack traditional gatekeeping functions making anyone a potential creator and broadcaster of content. The agentic potential of the Internet is what prompted utopian visions of how it would revolutionize the public sphere (Quandt, 2018). As the social media natives carve out spaces online for keeping the "Gemeinschaft," they simultaneously reflect a lack of utilization of social media for public sphere discussions (Benhabib, 1996). When closed-off spaces are used for discussing current affairs and news, as exemplified by "Slaje" (mimicking the members' grandparents' café gatherings and discussions), one could expect that the participants were likely to engage

with news and topics that other people in their communities were also reading and dis- cussing, similar to features in the emergence of Habermas' ideal publics (Habermas, 1989, pp. 42–43). However, the news they share and discuss may to different extents, as in Tönnies' concept of the public, be shaped by instrumental and strategic reasonings, either due to social media's occasional de facto editorial functions (Brække & Larsen, 2022) or due to news outlet's profit-incentives. Furthermore, Slaje and its counterparts are constructed as closed spaces of few constant individuals, where exclusion is imperative, countering Habermas' principle of publicity. Earlier research suggesting that people may discuss and share news with those they are closest to, in closed groups online for privacy purposes (Kalogeropoulos, 2021; Papacharissi, 2010), is in other words supported. The reasons given by the social media natives for not utilizing online spaces for public sphere discussions illuminate their familiarity with economic rationales underlying these online spaces. Online spaces are not seen as places for "debating and deliberating," but places run on incentives of "buying and selling" (Fraser, 1992, p. 57). They rather utilize the "open" spaces for the purpose Tönnies' described for the press in the 19th century, then: as providers of information and others' opinions (e.g., Tönnies, 1922, p. 99), consequently taking the role as audiences in these spaces. According to Tönnies, Gesellschaft is "die Öffentlichkeit"; it is public life (Tönnies, 1887/2001, p. 3). Although the social media natives are oriented toward their community and the public, the groups that are created for sharing and discussing news and current affairs, with "Slaje" as example, still

consist of close relationships. Such spaces are private and answers to "semi-public social needs," then (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 50). In the words of Papacharissi (2010): "it is possible for the social to sustain elements of both public and private practices without being subsumed by either" (p. 49). A space like "Slaje" may hence not just fit as example of digital Gemeinschaft 2.0, when used for upholding close relationships, but as one out of many forms of "private publics" (Papacharissi, 2010). It is a socially motivated space, but it also carries an outwards orientation to public affairs and news. "Slaje" and its counterparts demonstrate people's creation of a safe location "at home" for under- standing and discussing what is "outside" of the home, but relevant to them (i.e., the public). They may function as "training grounds" (Fraser, 1992, p. 60) for public participation, and contribute to the creation of experiences "of belonging" to a larger community (Berlant, 2008, p. 25). That is, alongside their functions as private spaces, conducive to per- sonal relationships. Their communication never transgresses the borders of their closed-off spaces but continue existing as "privately contained activities with a public scope" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 153). They thus exemplify the emergence of societal functions enabled by "a private, not a public, sphere" in digital society, and hence the relevance of communication and reflection in such spaces to contemporary democracies (Papacharissi, 2014).

There are limitations to Tönnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as a strong-held dichotomy when attempting to understand contemporary societies and communities. Ling (2014) argued that Tönnies' conviction

of an inescapable take-over of Gemeinschaft by Gesellschaft was too fixed and static. The dynamic relationship between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, rather than a linear definite progress toward the latter's direction, is greater than explicated by Ling. Platforms enable social spaces, in the name of Gemeinschaft, but for Gesellschaft purposes. People accept some of these for-profit constructions while resisting others. Occasionally, they use closed and private spaces, enabled by the for-profit platforms, in orientations toward their public (according to Tönnies closely related to Gesellschaft) while still confined within the realm of the private and safe (where Gemeinschaft occurs).

Why it is so important for the social media natives of this study to not leave traces in "open" spaces online may be manifold, however (see, for example, Coles & Saleem, 2021; Laurison, 2015). One may start out by seeing their responses through the lens of their "distinct positionalities of privilege" (Fang et al., 2019, p. e11). Had a similar study been conducted elsewhere, where access to technology is lower, results would be different. The participants had ample and long experiences with for-profit social media (LaRose et al., 2001). Education and income are considered pivotal factors conjunctly affecting an individual's access and use of information and communications technology (Fang et al., 2019). Higher education has moved toward becoming "mass education" in Norway (Arnesen, 2000, p. 227), and a large majority of the population has access to and use the Internet and mobile platforms (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). Furthermore, while research shows that there is a large amount of aggression, incivility, and

hate online (A. A. Anderson et al., 2014; Greene et al., 2022), the participants of this study rarely described their reluctance to be visible to others online as connected to fears of being harassed or as due to uncivil argumentation cultures. Such actions are often directed toward minorities in Norway (Sønsteby, 2020). The participants were all White (Fang et al., 2019), cisgender presenting, Europeans. Moreover, they also had stable social offline networks (Lu & Hampton, 2017), inherent to the creation of their closed-off spaces on social media. In other words, they share privileges making them not face or expect challenges that others not similarly positioned are more likely to experience and expect, both beyond and within the national borders of Norway.

As they explained not wanting their interactions to end up before unintended audiences (Papacharissi, 2010), they describe an "awareness of others' awareness" (Lu & Hampton, 2017), making them careful rather than more visibly active (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017, p. 4). A need for impression management (Goffman, 1959) and the Internet's lack of stable borders (Papacharissi, 2010) may play part as explanatory factors to the participants' attentiveness to space. When being used to the rationales of social media stimulating sudden "virality" of content and profiles (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), one may as a young adult and student, for example, envisioning facing a job market, be especially careful and attentive to current and future audiences (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 142). The social media natives' "social media skills" and platform knowledge are key to their careful, rather than more (visibly) active (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017), behaviors. By utilizing their otherwise

advantageous offline social network (Lu & Hampton, 2017), they can allow their previous experiences (LaRose et al., 2001) shape their use of different features afforded within and between social media (Karahanna et al., 2018; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017), the way they do. The conversations with the social media natives illustrate not only that different platforms answer to different needs (Karahanna et al., 2018) and are used differently according to what they provide, for example, in terms of strong and weak ties (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017), always enabled by social media's incentives to keep people active (van Dijck, 2009), but that one's offline circumstances are pivotal to one's use of social media.

As research has emphasized the increasingly prominent role of social media for political communication and public issue contestation (e.g., Andersen, 2019; Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021, p. 102), this article sheds light on the con- tingent nature of such participation. Specifically, it emphasizes perceptions of constraints and possibilities online shaped by Gesellschaft mechanisms. This study illustrates how social media structures have implications for users' practices beyond what they enable and prevent in techno- logical terms (see Črnič & Prodnik, 2015, for the role of platform architecture for deliberative communication). The ways that social media track, analyze, and "feed back" information to users (see Jensen & Helles, 2017) are just one (technical) dimension.

Research should look further into the perceptions of, and practices in, social media by people that have grown up with

offline/online entangled public spheres. The extent to which space attentiveness and protective strategies are connected to people's specific age, generational status (Fang et al., 2019), and/or life situation (Parviz & Piercy, 2021), or whether it becomes increasingly prevalent across generations as the amount of people accustomed to profit-seeking social media grows, should be further scrutinized. If the latter would turn out true, Tim Hwang's (2020) call for policies (due to an "attention crisis") may have relevance beyond online advertising systems and the status of its continuity. Concurrently, "the private" continues as commodity (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 43). Social media companies continue using technology to benefit economically from people's interpersonal communication and close relationships. Moreover, scholars have long called for developing social media in line with public service ideals (Fuchs, 2014). Policies may play a part in inhibiting extra constraints on citizens' utilization of the public sphere for reciprocity and participation. Currently, social media's for-profit features and rationales continue not inviting public sphere participation, seen in the responses from the social media natives of this study. Such findings should prompt pertinent questions in a country like Norway where freedom of expression is generally considered highly satisfied (Nielsen et al., 2019) and where social media platforms increasingly provide spaces and avenues for public sphere interactions (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021).

Conclusion

The term digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 highlights that social media provide additional spaces for social life. The results from 11 in-depth interviews with Norwegian social media natives demonstrate that social media are used for upholding social relationships in closed-off online spaces. Outside of these spaces, the participants rather take on roles as audience members, refraining from using social media for public sphere participation. While digital Gemeinschaft 2.0 confines itself to posit that people continue to uphold close social relationships in digital society, it concurrently points to the continuous tension between Gesellschaft and digital Gemeinschaft (Ling, 2014), as it materializes in for-profit social media. People grapple with products of Gesellschaft, and its adhering rationalizing and self-interest rationales, while utilizing it for the purpose of Gemeinschaft in digital society. Simultaneously, social media corporations invite and utilize people's social life, their interaction with close relationships, and community building for economic profit and growth.

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Article 3

Hyperconnected publics: Algorithmic support of counter-public spaces on TikTok

Luise Salte and Helle Sjøvaag

This paper is not included in the repository because it is still in review.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Innledende spørsmål: alder, kjønn, studieretning, jobb (evt. oppfølgingsspørsmål "hva vil du jobbe med etter studier, hvorfor")

Jeg lurte på om du kunne starte med å fortelle meg om mediehverdagen din. Fra du står opp til du legger deg. (radio? telefon? snapchat nyheter? fjernsyn? streaming? podkast?)

- Hvilken rolle spiller telefonen i dette?

Hvordan får du med deg ting som skjer i samfunnet mer sånn generelt? (hvis du føler at du gjør det?)

- Hvilken rolle spiller telefonen i dette?

Kan du komme på en eller to saker du kanskje særlig lagt merke til over de siste to ukene?

- Kan du komme på hvordan du ble oppmerksom på denne/de sakene?
- Fortsetter den/de å være aktuelt? Hvor (medier, utenfor medier)?

Hvilke sosiale medier bruker du?

- Hvis du skulle klart deg med kun to - hvilke? hvorfor?
- Hva skiller disse fra andre?

Når bruker du sosiale medier (tid på døgnet/situasjon)?

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Hvis du måtte velge 3 tider på døgnet, på forhånd, når du kunne bruke sosiale medier - når ville det vært? hvorfor?

Evt.: ta frem din telefon (for å se på den selv)

Hvis du ville få en kjapp oppdatering på om noe nytt hadde skjedd, hvilken app ville du gått inn i da?

Hvis du ville vite hva folk snakket om for tiden, eller var opptatt av?

Hvis du ventet på bussen, og du kun kunne gå inn i en app, hvilken ville det vært tror du? Hvorfor?

Hvis du trengte å bare slappe av litt, mellom studiearbeid/forelesning feks, hvilken?

- Er "avslapping" forresten passende beskrivelse, synes du? Hvorfor (ikke)?

Hvis du trengte litt inspirasjon/motivasjon, og du kun kunne gå inn i en app, hvilken?

- Er "inspirasjon" eller "motivasjon" forresten passende ord, syns du? for det du liksom ville hatt ut av appen i en slik situasjon som du tenkte deg nå? Hvorfor (ikke)?

Hvis du hadde noe du ville dele med folk?

- Hvem er det du typisk ville delt dette med, i så fall? Hvem ser du for deg som "seere" av dette?
- Hvor? hva slags deling? (story/post/bilde/repost)
- Hva ville det vært, da? (feks. en mening? noe morsomt? noe visuelt pent? noe du satt pris på? Var inspirert av?)

Så om jeg forstår deg riktig er altså _X_ det viktigste sosiale mediet for din del?

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Hva tenker du er det nyttigste for folk med X?

Hva bruker du X til? (hvilke funksjoner er mest nyttige?)

Bruker du X mer eller mindre enn andre tror du? (/evt. Hvorfor)

Legger du ut ting (innlegg/story) / (kikker du mest?)

Sender du ting til folk i dm ofte? (/hvorfor (ikke)?)

@-er du folk, blir du @-et? (/hvorfor (ikke)?)

Bruker du og vennene dine #? bruker andre # ? hvem? (/hvorfor ikke?)

Hvordan tror du din bruk av X er sammenlignet med andres? Kan du komme på noen du vet som bruker det litt annerledes enn deg selv?

Man kan jo svare på story'ene til folk (på Instagram o.l.). Gjør du det av og til? Når? ("ferdige" svar-alternativer/skriver selv?)

Hvor mange følger du? (hvem følger du? bare folk du kjenner personlig?). Hvor mange/hvem følger deg, tenker du?

Hva møter folk typisk på Instagram, tenker du? Hva møter man på der, typisk?

Er det forskjell på hvordan man 'er' på Instagram/sosiale medier når man sitter på bussen versus når man er helt alene/hjemme? (Finnes det ting man gjør på telefonen som man helst gjør "i fred", alene liksom?

Er det noe spesielt du gjør/ikke gjør, om du vet at folk kan 'se deg over skulderen'? (skrolle forbi/stoppe opp/unngåelser)

Eksempel: "the tent"

Bruk pc

Kan du kikke på dette, og så forklare bare hva du tenker sånn helt umiddelbart? Hva leser du ut av det?

Hvordan tenker du at folk oppfatter dette innlegget?

Tenker du at *det er* meningen med innlegget? Fra [innholdsskaperens] side?

Har du sett dette før?

Hva er denne steds-markøren, her?

Eksempel: "Showing skin"

Bruk pc

Kan du kikke på denne videoen, og så forklare bare med dine egne ord til meg hva det er? Hva leser du ut av det?

Hvordan tenker du at folk oppfatter dette innlegget?

Tenker du at *det er* meningen med innlegget? Fra [innholdsskaperens] side?

Har du sett dette før?

Eksempel: "Celebrity kiss"

Kan du kikke på dette, og så forklare bare med dine egne ord til meg hva det er? Hva leser du ut av det?

Hvordan tenker du at folk oppfatter dette innlegget?

Tenker du at *det er* meningen med innlegget? Fra [innholdsskaperens] side?

Har du sett dette før?

Eksempel: "If I were a boy"

Kan du kikke på dette, og så forklare bare med dine egne ord til meg hva det er? Hva leser du ut av det?

Hvordan tenker du at folk oppfatter dette innlegget?

Tenker du at *det er* meningen med innlegget? Fra [innholdsskaperens] side?

Har du sett dette før?

Følger du de? Ville du fulgt de? (hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?) Hvem følger de typisk tenker du?

Hvorfor har de så mange følgere, tror du?

Vil du si at disse postene er vanlige eller uvanlige, eller verken eller?

Er de noe folk typisk møter på Instagram, tenker du? (hvordan?)

Hva synes du om de?

Har du noen tanker om influensere generelt?

Hva er forskjellen på at sånne folk (sånne som vi har eksempler på her) legger ut slike ting, eller tar opp ting som dette, og at andre gjør det?

(eks. politikere/journalister)

Vi skal tilbake til to av eksemplene vi nettopp så på, bare, men først så lurer jeg på

- snakker folk mye ved å bruke emojis?
- snakker du (folk du kjenner) av og til ved å bare bruke emojis? (hvem)
- Er det noen du bruker emojis med mer enn andre? (hvorfor)
- har du opplevd en situasjon der det er vanskelig å vite hva noen mener, fordi de bruker emojis på en måte du syns ikke gir helt mening/er rar?

Bruk utskrifter

Eksempel: "The tent"

Hvis du skal se for deg kommentarfeltene under denne posten. Hva gjør folk i dette kommentarfeltet, typisk?

- Er det spesielle emojier som blir brukt feks? - hvilke? - hvorfor akkurat de?)
- Bruker folk #-tags? (hvorfor (ikke)?)
- "@-er" folk hverandre, tror du? (hvorfor (ikke)?)

Hvis du måtte gjort ett eller annet i dette kommentarfeltet her, du kan velge helt selv, hva ville du gjort? hvorfor? hvorfor ikke?

- Hvis du måtte skrevet noe kun ved å bruke emojis, da? Hvorfor?

Vis kommentarfelt

PC (for farger)

Jeg lurer på om du kan forklare meg hva som skjer i dette kommentarfeltet, som om jeg var en oppegående bestemor, men som ikke forstod meg på sosiale medier?

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Eksempel: "If I were a boy"

Hvis du skal se for deg kommentarfeltene under denne posten. Hva gjør folk i dette kommentarfeltet, typisk?

- Er det spesielle emojier som blir brukt feks? - hvilke? - hvorfor akkurat de?)
- Bruker folk #-tags? (hvorfor (ikke)?) "@-er" folk hverandre, tror du? (hvorfor (ikke)?)
- Hvis du måtte gjort ett eller annet i dette kommentarfeltet her, du kan velge helt selv, hva ville du gjort? hvorfor? hvorfor ikke?
- Hvis du måtte skrevet noe kun ved å bruke emojis, da? hvorfor?

Vis kommentarfelt

PC (for farger)

Jeg lurer på om du kan forklare meg hva som skjer i dette kommentarfeltet, som om jeg var en oppegående bestemor, men som ikke forstod meg på sosiale medier

Hvem kommenterer på disse postene? Er det noen forskjell på de som velger å kommentere her, og de som velger å ikke gjøre det?

Når skriver man en kommentar, og når @ man noen? For din del da?

Hvordan vet man hva emojis betyr, egentlig?

Vis emojis i "notater" på intervjuers tlf.

Hva vil du si at dette betyr, om disse to står sammen… [*flytter litt rundt på emojis, og snakker om emojis/andre sosiale medie-situasjoner når informant har historier*]

Er det noe annet du kom på i løpet av dette intervjuet, som vi ikke har snakket om? Det kan være mer eller mindre relevant til det vi spesifikt snakket om?

Ble intervjuet slik du så for deg etter at du leste det her samtykkeskrivet? Hva hadde du sett for deg? Var det noe du ikke hadde forventet?

Appendix 2 – Information and consent form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet
 "Mobilt demokrati"?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke den demokratiske rollen av sosiale medier. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke rollen til nye sosiale medier, med "Instagram" som case, for offentligheten. Den demokratiske rollen av

mobile sosiale medier i en digital offentlig sfære er slik hovedtema for doktoravhandlingen. Avhandlingen strekker seg fra 2019 – 2024, og er delt inn i 3 understudier. De tre studiene berører hvert sitt tema og forskningsspørsmål, og skal sammen gi innsikt i hovedtemaet.

Forskningsspørsmålene retter seg mot hvordan bruken av mobile sosiale medier som Instagram utspiller seg for individer. Derfor retter spørsmålene seg både mot hvordan individer opplever publikasjoner fra populære aktører på Instagram, hvordan «vanlige brukere» kommuniserer på, utnytter og forstår Instagram, og hvordan personer som har særlig behov for å vinne legitimitet i offentligheten stiller seg til de mest populære mobile sosiale mediene. Slik tar prosjektet altså for seg hvordan offentlige aktører opptrer, «naturen» av dagens offentlige kommentarfelt, og hva interaksjoner på Instagram betyr for majoritet og minoritet.

Prosjektet er en doktorgradsstudie i medievitenskap.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Stavanger er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

For å undersøke hvordan individer opplever og bruker Instagram, er 10-15 studenter valgt ut, basert på deres alder og kjønn (med målsetning om så stor bredde mellom aldersgruppen 18-29 år som mulig, og kjønnsbalanse), samt uttrykkelige interesse i å delta i forskningsprosjektet. Denne er kommet som følge av en invitasjon til å delta i studien som gikk ut til 500 studenter ved Universitetet i Stavanger, trukket tilfeldig fra fem ulike fagdisipliner (helsefag, samfunnsfag, realfag, musikk og dans, ingeniør og sivilingeniør, og økonomi og juss).

De 10-15 personene valgt kom dermed som følge av tilfeldig uttrekning innenfor alder- og kjønnsgrupper etter innsamlede interessemeldinger.

Intervjuene er nødvendige for prosjektets innsikt i opplevde erfaringer med dagens sosiale medier, for å kunne si noe om hvordan innhold på Instagram oppleves i «den faktiske virkeligheten», av faktiske personer. Slik tilnærmes betydningen av dagens sosiale medier for demokratiske digitaliserte samfunn også utover observerte publikasjoner.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar i et intervju som varer mellom 0,5 – 1,5 time. Tema for intervjuet vil være dine erfaringer med sosiale medier (særlig Instagram). Slik styrer du selv hvilke opplysninger du ønsker å gi, eller ikke gi. Uavhengig av hvilke opplysninger eller informasjon du velger å gi, vil all informasjon behandles konfidensielt. Jeg tar lydopptak og notater av intervjuet. Lydopptaket vil bli lagret sikkert, og transkribert til tekst. Også notatene som blir tatt under intervjuet vil bli lagret sikkert, sammen med lyd- og tekstversjonen av intervjuet. Dine opplysninger vil behandles med varsomhet, og et fiktivt navn vil erstatte ditt navn når intervjuet blir brukt videre i prosjektet. For å kunne kontakte deg i ettertid, vil ditt navn og din kontaktinformasjon (e-post) sammen med ditt fiktive navn, oppbevares sikkert og atskilt fra analysearbeidet i prosjektet. Dette vil bli slettet ved prosjektets slutt. Også lydopptak vil bli slettet ved prosjektets slutt.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- De som vil ha tilgang er Luise Salte.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data.

Alder og kjønn vil være de eneste kjennetegnene av deg som person ved prosjektets publikasjoner.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes Januar 2024. Da vil personopplysninger (navn og kontaktinformasjon) og lydopptak slettes. Transkriberinger av intervjuet (som nevnt vil være anonymisert) vil beholdes for etterprøvbarhet.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- *innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,*
- *å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,*
- *få slettet personopplysninger om deg,*
- *få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og*
- *å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.*

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra universitetet i Stavanger har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?
Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- *Universitetet i Stavanger ved Luise Salte, luise.salte@uis.no.*
- *Vårt personvernombud: personvernombud@uis.no*
- *NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.*

Med vennlig hilsen

Luise Salte

Prosjektansvarlig
(Forsker)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Mobilt demokrati», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

☐ *å delta i intervju*

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. januar 2024

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 3 – Email sent to university students

Hei,

Jeg er en stipendiat ved IMS som trenger respondenter til doktoravhandlingsprosjektet mitt om sosiale medier!

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke nye sosiale medier sin rolle for offentlighet og demokrati. Dermed retter avhandlingen seg særlig mot hvordan nåværende "medievirkeligheter" utspiller seg for individer. Slik er individers opplevelser og bruk av medier særlig interessant, både fra majoritets- og minoritetsperspektiv.

Jeg ser i utgangspunktet etter 10-15 respondenter til individuelle intervju. Intervjuet varer fra 45 min til 1,5 timer.

Det behøves ingen forkunnskaper eller forberedelser for å delta. De eneste kriteriene er at du er student ved UiS og at du er mellom 18-29 år.

Samtalen vil finne sted på UiS Campus Ullandhaug. Samtalen, og din deltakelse, vil behandles anonymt.

For å delta sender du en e-post med navn og alder til luise.salte@uis.no, så avtaler vi et tidspunkt for intervju. Send gjerne også en e-post om du ønsker mer informasjon eller lurer på noe.

Med vennlig hilsen

Luise Salte

PhD-Stipendiat

Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet

Universitetet i Stavanger

Appendix 4 – Codebook comment sections

	Category	Description
1.	Accusations	Accusations of wrongdoings: Utterances that proclaim that someone/something is guilty/to blame/responsible for an "offense" or crime (legal or moral). Includes claims that something has/is being done (the offense existence), and that what has certainly happened/is certainly happening is an offense/crime (the nature of something as an offense or not).
2.	Defenses	Defenses for someone or something (e.g., action, practice, custom) that is perceived as blamed for something (by the creator of the post, other participants in the comment sections, or other people/society).
2.1	Innocence	Utterances that claim that someone has not committed an alleged crime or is not responsible for something
2.2	Trivialize	Utterances that claim that what has been done is not a crime/not a serious matter.
3.	Factual claims	Claims about facts/reality. Utterances proclaiming what is true and factual in the

		world. Consist of claims of what is true in past and present, sometimes using stories and experiences, statistics, numbers, or the law.
4.	Responses	Responses to other participants' / the creators' comments. Includes utterances that reacts to others without necessarily considering others' argument. Can for example include a short question, or a short answer. Does not include 1. When people want to make others aware of the post (using @, which otherwise would indicate responding), 2. Comments where the creator is tagged, but where the participant does not respond to the creator's contribution in the comment section. Sub-categories describe different kinds of responses.
4.1	Response to others' claims or arguments	Any response to others' claims or arguments. Does not have to explicitly recognize (even with minimal requirement of recognition, see 4.1.1).
4.1.1	Reciprocity (attempt, nuance)	Utterances explicitly *oriented to* other's claims or arguments. Minimal requirement for recognition (e.g., "yes I know that"), before providing their own argument/viewpoint back. When justified, i.e., attempted explained (Andersen, 2020, p. 350), it is coded in "justification" (Wessler & Rinke, 2014).
4.2	Attack	Verbal attack on another participant in the comment section. See 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.
4.2.1	Generic attacks	Utterances that do not attack anything that is particular to the participant being attacked, but that use insults/ridicules in a way that "could be used to attack anyone/any utterance" (Andersen, 2020, p. 350).

4.2.2	Attack on morale or intentions	Utterances that attack someone's "moral character or intention" (Andersen, 2020, p. 350). Overlap with "8. Condemnations"
4.3	Information	Utterances where participants are asking others or thanking them for providing information. This category also includes 'rhetorical questions', posed to make a point/effect other than receiving informative answers.
4.4	Justification	Utterances that claim something and attempt to explain their viewpoint/argument through giving reasons (Wessler & Rinke, 2014).
4.4.1	Potentially verifiable justification	Utterances that claim something and attempt to explain their viewpoint/argument through giving reasons, using "a potentially verifiable justification for the opinion expressed" (Wessler & Rinke, 2014, p. 8) such as a source or statistics.
4.5	'What-aboutism'	Utterances that responds to other's claim/viewpoint and defends something/someone by pointing to a perceived "opposite" or comparable situation. Utterances are logical fallacies somewhat attempting to direct a conversation away from a stated (perceived) criticism/accusation by some kind of counteraccusation or by addressing another issue (see Dykstra, 2020).
5.	Rule Case Reasoning	Utterances that negotiate rules through employing cases (an issue as seen addressed in the specific post, or other examples, statistics, stories), for example proving or challenging a general rule or law. The rule or law can be informal or formal (relating to customs, norms, laws) specific to a community and/or a general and universal rule or law. Sub-categories explain what kind

		of rule(s) participants discuss, by employing different cases.
5.1	Authenticity, realness	Utterances discussing authenticity and/or being "real" as social norm (i.e. rule), through employing cases.
5.2	Civility	Utterances discussing civility as social norm (i.e. rule), through employing cases.
5.3	Gender equality	Utterances discussing gender equality as a social rule (i.e. rule) through employing cases
5.4	Public accountability	Utterances discussing public accountability as social norm (i.e. rule) through employing cases
5.5	Sexualization of women and sexual assault	Utterances discussing sexualization of women, "rape culture", or sexual assaults as social custom (i.e. rule) through employing cases
6.	Solution-orientations	Utterances where a participant points to a solution, the need for a solution, or decision-making, in order to solve or deal with a problem.
7.	Acclaims	Utterances acclaiming persons, utterances, or actions.
8.	Condemnations	Utterances expressing disapproval of someone or something through deeming them/it as morally bad/evil (see Andersen, 2020, p. 220). Disapproval is uttered as relating to others' "ignorance", "insanity", "self-victimization", lack of "authenticity" or "civility", "double standards", and/or through feelings of "disgust", "fear/sadness", or "shame, embarrassment" (in the speaker and/or placed at the receiver).

9.	The debate	Meta-deliberation: discussing or mentioning "the debate", including how participants act in the debate, the post's status as debate item
10.	Other	Utterances where it is unclear if the participant is being ironic or sarcastic, or where participants seem to be speaking to someone in ways where it is not clear to outsiders what is meant, and the initial comment could not be located in the data corpus (see ethical criteria for comment selection) (e.g., "@username yes, truly awful. What happened to being a role model for fuck's sake")