Anti-social media: What are the discursive features of hate speech comments in news comment sections online?

Analyzing the nature of discourse in below-the-line comment sections on Facebook

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Master's thesis in Nordic Media

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II

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Master Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The rise of digital platforms and social media has made more people use their free speech to participate in the political debated. On the positive side, having a great diversity of views and perspectives is good for both the society and democracy. However, one can clearly see that the debates have become "tougher" and more polarized, and online hate speech has become a serious problem in today's digital society.

The background for this project has been a wish to gain a better understanding of hate speech senders by examining their comments with emphasis on language and discourse. This thesis examines with the discursive feature of hate speech comments in news comment sections on Facebook. The term "discourse" can be understood as a useful tool for understanding and describing the relationship between use of language and different reality perceptions. In other words, discourse can be defined as a particular way we express ourselves about reality

The analysis has shown how the senders, through language, construct their own discourse. I have decided to call this "the counter-discourse" as it mainly acts as a resistance against the counter-hegemonic discourse. In the counter- discourse, the senders reality perception circles around the idea that the public discourse is based on lies and propaganda. Here the plot itself is organized around who the enemies are, who construct and manipulate the truth, and what kind of consequences it has for the society.

After having analyzed different Facebook comment sections, a common feature is that the senders show an extremely hostile and one-sided attitude towards the public discourse and the society as a whole. In this way, they reject factual discussions and mutual understanding.

PREFACE

Writing a master's thesis is not an easy task, and completing this project has been a roller coaster from beginning to end. The road to completing this project has been a tough and educational process, and therefore there are several people who deserve a big thank you for helping me reaching my goal.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Charles Ess. Thank you for all of our good conversations, and for being patient and motivating, and not to mention for being honest and constructive in all feedback. Without your help, I would never have been able to complete this project.

I would also like to thank my ever-supportive family. Thank you for your support, encouragement and dedication.

Last but not least, thank you my dear fiancé, Jon. Thank you for being there for me throughout this project, for being patient and understanding, and for comforting and motivating me during the toughest periods.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter will give an overview of my thesis as a whole. First, I will describe the project summary: topic description, why I chose this topic in the first place, and why this is relevant in the modern society. Second, I will do a short summary of what has previously been studied and potential research gaps. Lastly, I will present my research question and how my thesis is structured.

1.1 Project background

Online hate speech has become an increased problem in today's society, especially with the rise of social media platforms. In recent years, Facebook has become a major traffic driver for Norwegian news sites, much because of the increased use of smartphones, and the ability to comment, discuss, and share content. In many ways, this is good for both the society and the democracy. Nevertheless, the democratization of the public debate has also led to a "tougher" and more polarized debate where extreme utterances get to dominate. Over the past decades, the refugee crisis and the changing face of multiculturalism in Europe has led to an increase in support for the far-right in Western countries. This development can particularly be reflected in political debates on social media, and hate speech and net hate (netthets) targeted against Muslims and immigrants on Facebook is a phenomenon many of us are familiar with. Not only has online hate speech become a democratic problem, but because of the instantaneousness of the internet, it has become more accessible, visible, more available, and more persistent in a different way than "offline" hate speech (Brown, 2018, p.304).

This thesis addresses the discursive features of the sender's hate speech comments from a linguistic perspective. The term "discourse" can be described as a particular way of expressing ourselves about the reality, and can be understood as the very relationship between the use of language and the perception of reality (Nilsen, 2014, p.17). Through discourse analysis, I have examined news comment sections of three different newspapers on Facebook with the purpose of revealing the discursive features of their hate speech comments.

An important part of my thesis has also been to map the scope of online hate speech, and uncover statistical and demographic factors in order to present a clearer picture of *who* the senders are. Based on different research showing that hate speech senders mainly consist of older, angry, white men, it has also been essential for my thesis to find out whether or not such findings would match my own research. In addition to analyzing the comments' discursive features, I have also conducted a quantitative content analysis in order to reveal particular demographic features: gender, age and ethnicity, in addition to who most of the recipients are, and if there are specific news topics that contribute to the increase of hate speech comments.

1.1.1 Previous research overview

Knowledge about hate speech senders has been rather limited in the past. Traditionally, previous research has mainly centered around normative questions related to the legal boundaries between hate speech and freedom of speech, and hate speech *recipients* or *targets* (Nadim and Fladmoe 2016, p.11). Nevertheless, online hate speech has over the past decade gained lot of attention in both political and social debates, much due to the growth of social media platforms. Because of this, more research on hate speech *senders* has been conducted, especially in pace with the growing right-wing populism in Western countries, and the increased hatred towards Muslims, migrants and refugees.

In recent years, several reports (Institutt for Samfunnsforskning (IFS), 2016) and Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet (LDO), 2018). have also been written with a primary focus on content analysis in order to map the scope of online hate speech, and to analyze statistical and demographic features when it comes to both senders and recipients. Among other things, results from ISF (2016) showed that hate speech comments were mostly written by men, and that men also had had a higher tolerance for hate speech than women.

In 2012, Slovenian researchers Karmen Erjavec and Melita Koviačič wanted to map the scope of online hate speech, and introduced us to hate speech senders as well as their strategies for writing them. Here, they also highlighted possible motives for publishing hate speech comments, such as excitement, boredom, and drawing attention to social injustice. Various studies show that the online hate speech is a prolonged extension of conflicts in society

(Erjavec & Koviačič, 2012; Holter, 2018), and that hatred is not a primary motivation itself. In 2015, people were also introduced to Kyrre Liens «The Internet Warriors", a documentary where he portrayed both Norwegian and international online debaters for the purpose of revealing who they are. Several debaters showed strong contempt towards minority groups, especially Muslims. Nadim & Fladmoe point out how social, structural and cultural currents influence our perception of what and who is "different", and that the senders base their hate speech comments on prejudices, stereotypes and notions of differences between groups (Chakraborti & Garland 2015, Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.41).

Even though understanding hate speech senders may be difficult, it is a highly interesting topic that both fascinates and awakens disgust. With this thesis, I want to contribute to further research on hate speech senders with emphasis on language and discursive features. This brings us further to the next part where I am going to present the research question for this thesis.

1.2   Research question

The point of departure for this thesis has been the uncensored comments in TV2, Nettavisen, and Dagbladet's below-the-line comment sections on Facebook. The research section itself is divided in two parts. In part one, I will start with a quantitative content analysis with emphasis on demographic features in order to draw a broader picture of *who* the senders are. The content analysis will be the secondary research method. I have further taken the research down on a "deeper" level where the examination of the senders' *comments* has been the main focus. By using discourse analysis, I want to examine the relationship between the senders' language, reality perception, and discourse. The discourse analysis serves as the primary research method, and is the overall main theme in this thesis. This brings us further to the actual research question which reads as follows:

What are the discursive features of hate speech comments in news comment sections online??

In order to answer my research question, I have also put up five sub questions that will help break down the analysis. These questions will work as a guideline to keep me on track.

- What are the demographic features of hate speech senders? (Age, gender, ethnicity)

- Are there specific news topics or headlines that contribute to the increase of hate speech comments?
- Are there any people or groups in the society that are more likely to be hate speech recipients?
- How does the senders' reality perception and understanding of the society as a whole help to construct a counter-discourse?
- What are the linguistic features of the counter-discourse?

Discourse is the overall theme, where the goal is examine the nature of discourse in comment section on Facebook. how the senders, through narratives, rhetoric and conspiracy theories, form an alternative discourse, a counter-discourse that can be understood as an opposition to the hegemonic and public discourse.

2 THEORY

This chapter presents the theoretical background for my thesis. In the first part of the chapter I will define central and relevant terms, among others, "hate speech" and "freedom of speech". Having knowledge about these terms is essential, much because the terms can be seen as the very core of the problems regarding hate speech in public debates. Further on, I will discuss the democratization of the internet, as well as social media's effect on online hate speech. In the last part of the chapter I will discuss previous research of hate speech senders.

2.1   What is hate speech?

Hate speech is far from a new phenomenon. It has existed for centuries and has deliberately been used as "a tool in war and conflict to legitimate persecution, genocide, hate and discrimination of a selected group of people" (Nadim, Fladmoe & Wessel-Aas, 2016, p.15). There is no unambiguous definition of hate speech, neither in Norway nor internationally. Yet the term is commonly understood as "hateful or discriminating speech targeted towards an individual's assumed group affiliation, or certain minority groups" (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.12). According to Norwegian law, hate speech is illegal and can be defined as hateful and discriminating speech about people or groups based on their 1) skin color, national or ethnic background, 2) religion or life stance, 3) sexual orientation, or 4) disability. The Norwegian penal code, §185 (previously § 135a) *Hatefulle Ytringer (n.d.)* states as following:

> […] fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years for the person who intentionally or grossly negligent publicly imposes a discriminatory or hateful speech. As an expression, use of symbols is also considered. Anyone who, in the presence of others intentionally or grossly negligently, imposes such an offense against anyone affected by it, cf. the second paragraph, shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment for up to 1 year (Lovdata, n.d., §185)

Thus, in order for an utterance to defined as hate speech, it has to be directed towards one of these grounds. With that said, other hateful utterances can still be defined unlawful as they may be tried in relation to other laws, such as laws on discrimination, defamation or threats (Midtbøen, Steen-Johnsen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2017, p.49). The term «hate speech» can take form in different ways. In existing research, a number of different designations such as "hate

rhetoric", "offenses", "harassment", "stigma" and "net hate" (netthets) are widely used as adjacent phenomena. What these designations have in common, is that they are all tied to one or several grounds for discrimination, and have in common that they designate similar forms of discrimination. Stubberud and Eggebø (2016) describe it as following:

> The terms are not synonyms, but overlap to a varying degree. The term "hate speech" is often associated with very serious offenses, while other "negative comments," direct our thoughts to less serious utterances (Stubberud & Eggebø, 2016, p.40).

Unlike the legal definition of "hate speech," there will in many cases be a "gliding transition" between illegal and punishable utterances and other similar non-punishable utterances. According to Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet (LDO), hate speech that is not covered by the penal code can also have very negative consequences for both individuals and the society as a whole (LDO, 2015). In the public debate, the term "hate speech" is often used in a broader sense than from a legal position. In the wake of this, LDO has suggested an expanded definition of the term "hate speech".

2.1.1 The expanded definition of hate speech

Since hate speech that is not encompassed by the penal code may have just as negative effect on recipients as *illegal* hate speech, a different approach to the term "hate speech" has emerged. This expansion highlights social, cultural, psychological and cognitive aspects, and is often used in social studies. Unlike the legal approach to the term, the expanded definition also takes the intentions *behind* the utterances, and *potential consequences* for receivers into account. Research in social science show that *both* illegal and "legal" hate speech can be damaging to both recipients and the society, and must therefore be understood from a broader perspective (LDO, 2015, p.5). First of all, hate speech contain language that promotes conspiracy theories, dehumanizing metaphors, racism, phobias and ideas about own superiority. Second, the rhetoric is also based on consequences because it may/might affect people's sense of dignity and social status, which can further lead to fear, anxiety, dehumanization, and in worst case, violence (Nilsen, 2014a; cited in Holter, 2018, p.18).

Among other things, LDO (2015) also suggest that an expanded definition of hate speech is necessary in order to be able to discuss the phenomenon in public debates, and for further preventive work (LDO, 2015, as cited in Holter, 2018). The expanded definition of hate

speech suggested by LDO, is described as following:

> Hate speech is degrading, threatening, harassing or stigmatizing speech that affects the individual's or the group's dignity, reputation, and social status by using linguistic and visual means that promote negative feelings, attitudes and perceptions based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, gender, impaired functioning, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity and age (LDO, 2015, p.12).

This definition covers an even broader ground than penal code § 185 *Hatefulle Ytringer*. Although the sender's *intention* not necessarily is based on pure hate, such utterances are still based on unfounded fear, a contempt for what or who is considered different, notions of natural hierarchies, and an exclusionary rhetoric. In its most extreme form, hate speech also includes threats, glorification and incitement to violence, murder rhetoric and in some cases in combination with hate crime (LDO, 2015, p.13) Overall, one can say that hate speech is a complex matter, and the borderline between hate speech and free speech is a complex matter. This brings us to the next term "freedom of speech".

2.2 Freedom of speech

I despise what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. This declaration, attributed to Voltaire, covers the idea that freedom of speech is worth defending, even the kind of speech that you find repellent. In its broadest sense, freedom of speech can be described as freedom to express ones opinions without negative consequences or interference from the state (Warburton, 2009, p.1). The principle of free speech is the cornerstone of every democratic society, and commitment to free speech involves protecting all kinds of speech, including speech you do not want to hear. Free speech is deeply rooted in the Norwegian constitution, and the Norwegian constitution §100 has granted free speech since 1814. Article 19, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United nations 1948 states:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Warburton, 2009, p.2).

The terms "freedom of expression" and "freedom of speech" tend to be used interchangeably. Albeit there is a slight difference between these terms. Freedom of expression includes not only written and oral speech, but also, for example, publishing of art, music, or satirical cartoons (Midtbøen et al., 2017, p.20). Freedom of speech is the freedom to write and speak, and can be seen as one aspect of the broader term "freedom of expression". Since this paper

focuses on hateful written comments, I will therefore use the term "freedom of speech" or "free speech" instead of "freedom of expression".

After having defined both "hate speech" and "freedom of speech", this chapter brings us further to the next term which is "social media". Even though many may have different interpretations of what social media is, most people would likely describe social media as a collective term for online platforms where people interact with each other, and create and share content (Enjolras, Karlsen, Steen-Johnsen & Wollebæk, 2013, p.11). Since being a central term in this thesis, I believe it is necessary to include a more concrete definition of what social media is.

2.3   Social media

Historically, social media can be seen as a new term, and is closely connected to the emergence of web 2.0. Unlike web 1.0. that primarily gave the opportunity to spread and share information, web 2.0 allows users to interact and collaborate by creating content to a much greater extent than before. According to Enjolras et al. (2013) social media can be used as a "collective term for platforms on the internet which opens up for social interaction, and makes it possible for users to create and share content in forms of text, photos, video, or links to other webpages" Enjolras et al., 2013,p.11). Yet several definitions of social media have previously been offered. In 2010, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61; cited in carr & Hayes, 2015, p.48). While in 2012, a more complex definition of social media was formed:

> (a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content (Howard & Parks, 2012, p.362; cited in Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.48).

I 2015, Caleb Carr & Elizabeth Hayes still believed that a new and wider, but still precise definition of social should be redefined. Among other things, they addresses the importance of delineating a social medium and a medium that facilitates socialness. Rather than defining

social media as a medium that can be used for socioemotional communication, they formally described it as following:

> […] Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.50).

According to Enjolras et al. (2013), one of the main purposes with social media is for users to highlight an already existing "offline" social network, and gradually expand this network through friends' friends. Because of this, meeting new people is rarely the main purpose for using social media, but yet the expansion of the contact areas is central to the understanding of social media as a modern tool for diversion and communication (Enjolras et al., 2013). Maybe the most significant change that social media has brought, is how social media has "shifted" the boundary between what is private and what is public. Because of this, a "new" understanding of the public room has emerged, where social media creates new relations between dissemination of information to a mass audience, and the communication between certain individuals. An example is how private conversations take place in the public room, and public debates invade the private sphere (ibid, p.190).

This undermines the democratization of the public debate on social media. Overall, social media has expanded the public debate, and has given everyone with access to the internet the opportunity to participate. In particular, Facebook has over the past few years become a central arena for political debates. One of the reason for this is, among other things, (online) newspapers' digital viewers' digital transfer to Facebook. As a result, the threshold for participating in political debates has been much lower, which has challenged the boundary between hate speech and freedom of speech. This brings us further to the next part of the chapter where I will discuss the democratization of the internet and its effect on the culture of online debates, social media's impact on hate speech, and how the far-right is growing on social media, especially on Facebook. In addition, I will also go into previous research of hate speech senders, and its relevance to my own research.

2.4   The democratization of the internet

The public debate is one of the most important cornerstones in any democratic society, and it is highly valued and considered necessary for a functional democracy. It builds upon the

principle of free speech and political utterances, where all citizens are granted the right to freely speak and criticize the state and other subjects (Midtbøen et al., 2017, p.28). Public debates have a long history in the Norwegian media scene. An example is the TV-debate, which has been broadcasting since the 1960's when NRK began television broadcasts. Another example how Norwegian newspapers traditionally have kept a strong position as an arena for exchanging opinions and thoughts. That said, the digitalization of media has taken civil participation to a new level. Before the development of web 2.0, the opportunity to create user-generated content was much less available. Many early web pages were static without the opportunity for users to add information, interact, and collaborate with other users (Strickland, n.d.). The development of web 2.0 has therefore allowed users to create and share content and information on a different level than before.

There has also been a technical infrastructure underlying the internet. In the early 2000's, the internet was mainly accessed by the World Wide Web, but the rapid development of smartphones and mobile devices (e.g. tablets, iPads) has given people access to social media through applications without having to go through a web browser (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p.15). Social media can be seen as a new medium of communication, and has become strongly integrated in our society in many different ways. Billions of people are using social media for different purposes, and it has also has emerged as key venues for encouraging citizens' engagement and participation in political debates. Twitter and Facebook, especially, have become arenas where politicians can achieve visibility directly with the voters, and for users to share their opinions and participate in public debates and discussions. Many newspapers have also turned to Facebook where much of the online debates take place through below-the-line comment sections. Many can agree that the evolution of social media has had a strong impact on the democratization of the internet. In short, democratization can be defined as: "a redistribution of political influence and an expansion of the public debate – thus, it will mean an increase in citizens' participation in political activities at the expense of the traditional political elites" (Hindman, 2009; cited in Enjolras et al., 2013, p.30).

On the positive side, this democratization is a good thing because it expands the democracy and gives "everybody" a voice. Nevertheless, the democratization of the internet and the rapid development of "new" social media platforms has also ensured the development of a negative "culture of expressions" (ytringskultur) much due to the lack of quality assurance of

utterances, and normative questions tied to hate speech, censorship and free speech. According to Bangstad et. al (2011), platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, as well as news' comment sections have generated new partial publics with its peculiar dynamics.

Among other things, these platforms open up for sharing of extreme and uncensored utterances and false information. The democratization of the internet and the emergence of social media has strengthened the opportunity to express ourselves hateful and unfiltered in the public sphere. This democratization, combined with the opportunity for anonymity, contributes to a "selective reinforcement of group thinking, extremism, and polarization (Adams, 2011; cited in Bangstad et al., 2011, p.338). The availability and the increasing use and of social media, combined with its network structure, has also led to hate speech being spread quickly and reaching a big audience (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.11). With a growing far-right on the internet, critical questions about hate speech, democracy and free speech have been asked, especially when it comes to the function of the online debate. In the next section I will discuss social media's effects on hate speech.

2.4.1 Hate speech and the impact of social media

Hate speech has always existed, but with the increasing use of the internet and social media has led to a massive growth of trolling and destructive behavior (Nadim et al., 2016, p.15). Over the past decade, social media have become an important arena for political debates, especially platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Many politicians, organizations, and news outlets use these platforms to spread their message and to communicate with their audience, as well as users exchange opinions and participate in debates and discussions. Among other things, this shift is strongly correlated with how social media has changed the way we consume news. This can particularly be seen on Facebook, which has become a major traffic driver for news sites, much because of general increased mobile use, and the ability to share content. Today, most news sites have their own Facebook page. By liking or following their Facebook page, users can keep themselves updated on news from all over the world without even entering any news website. For example, by simply clicking "like" on VG's Facebook page, VG news will automatically appear on the users' Facebook feed. Facebook news pages are also being constantly updated and we do not have to wait overnight for breaking news anymore.

As Facebook has become significantly more "news-oriented", much of the political debate has also transferred from offline to online. For example, news below-the-line comment sections on Facebook contribute to getting more people to engage in in political debates. Even though this development has strengthened the democratic participation in many ways, it has also caused several challenges. Net hate and hate speech on social media (and the internet in general) has become a significant problem in today's society, and many have witnessed the proliferation of hate speech, harassment, and bullying in various groups and comment sections on Facebook. For example, in the wake of 9/11, and a gradual increase of Muslim immigrants, migrants and refugees to European countries, the increasing development of offensive, discriminatory and extreme utterances has become a part of the speech diversity in public debates. Over the past few decades, there has been a resurgence of right-wing attitudes in Europe, in parallel with the growing political influence of right-wing populist parties. At the same time, this has also led to radical and extreme attitudes being channelled into debate forums, comment sections, and social media (Holter, 2018, p.1). The aggressive debate climate has led to a a "harder" and more polarized public debate, where hate speech and harassment has become a part of the debate culture.

2.5   Social media and the emergence of the far-right

Many have witnessed the emergence of the far-right in political debates on Facebook, and one might argue that the far-right and far right extremists have moved from "the street" to "the internet". According to Haanshuus (2018), "right-wing activism is not the same as politically motivated violent acts, but rather the presence and spread of racist, anti-democratic and/or violence-denouncing attitudes" (Haanshuus, 2018; cited in Bjørgo, 2018, p.147). In addition, digital media has also democratized access to unlimited amounts of information, and in recent years, the far-right has gained even more power to define the terms of debate in the Norwegian public. One example is how the far-right is using Facebook to cultivate their hatred towards Muslims and immigrants, both nationally and across borders. An example is how political groups and organizations such as «Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge (SIAN)", Norwegian Defence League (NDL)" and "Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (German for «Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) (PEGIDA)" have established themselves on Facebook by creating pages and groups where people with the same political beliefs can join.

Another example is how right-wing populist news sites are getting more established on the internet, and how they are growing in the peripheral area of the established media landscape. Right-wing news sites goes under the term "alternative media". Alternative media can be described as an opposite to the established mainstream media (MSM), that challenges "the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception" (Fuchs, 2010, p.178). As mainstream media typically represents "the majority", they reach a much bigger audience than alternative media. On the other hand, alternative media does not have public or commercial interests, but is rather based on an idealistic foundation with a clear editorial point of view (https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/alternative-medier-i-vekst/69652920). Here, the terms "citizen journalism", "critical content", and "alternative distribution" comes into the picture (Fuchs, 2010, p.178-179). According to Trædal (2018), the top three far-right alternative websites, 1) Resett 2) Human Rights Service, and 3) Document, are at the top of the list of suppliers of Norway's most shared news cases (Trædal, 2018, p.16). While Resett and Document are online newspapers that mainly disseminate news, op-ed articles (opinion pieces), political analyzes, and reportages, Human Rights Service (Rights) is a Norwegian foundation that partly serves as news site and blog, and is widely known for publishing Islamophobic, racist and conspiratorial content (ibid, p.18).

2.5.1 The impact of alternative media

These alternative news sites have some clear commonalities. Among other things, they mostly attract the same audience, write extensively about the same topics, and have, to a large extent, an overlapping message that can be summed up as "a violent aggression against immigration and Islam, mainstream media, and immigration liberal voices" (Trædal, 2018, p.17). Online newspapers like Resett and Document are sources that are often used by the senders to gain information and knowledge. Both newspapers have a distinct right-wing editorial position and a clear immigration-critical theme focus in their media coverage (ibid, p.18). Previous research shows that people "on the right" are more skeptical of mainstream media than the rest of the population (Moe, Thorbjørnsrud & Fladmoe, 2017, p.116; cited in Midtbøen et al., 2017). Alternative media plays on the audience's established mistrust to mainstream media, which means that the sender's already established distrust will thus affect the likelihood for seeking to alternative information. For example, newspapers like Resett and Document, in

which both have a noticeably right-wing editorial position, and a marked immigration-critical kind of page in their media coverage, mostly publish content that match the senders' own political vews and opinions.

Even though the far right's beliefs often is referred to as «immigration critics», Trædal points out that their ideas often go deeper than "normal" fear of cultural changes and the possible negative effect the society. A common feature among far-right oriented news pages is that their main topic mainly circulates around the same conspiracy theories. In such theories, Muslims are violent and evil people who are planning to take over the West, and Islam is a dangerous and totalitarian ideology. On the other hand, there are internal enemies, the liberal elite (mainly politicians) who are guilty of the ongoing Islamization of the society, and the undermining of Christian values and Norwegian culture (Trædal, 2018, p. 32). Such conspiracy theories help to breed something that can be described as «moral panic". Trædal points out how these term can be described as a phenomenon where «a case or a problem, real or imaginary, is "stirred up" by media as a symbol of established norms, something that further becomes the very symbol of the combat between "us" and "them". Trædal points out how this often involves trifles in the big picture, such as foreign flags on May 17, the use of hijab in public workplaces, or serving halal food in school canteens. Because of its «symbolic power», it causes tremendous reactions. As this often becomes a huge part of the political debates online, factual and constructive immigration debates are being overrun by general xenophobia (ibid, p.35).

2.5.2 What makes online hate speech different from offline hate speech?

Hate speech is far from a new phenomenon, but with the good accessibility to the internet, one might say that hate speech itself has moved from "the street" to "online". Hate speech can be found anywhere on the internet, on forums, blogs, websites, or comment sections on social media. Even though online hate speech not necessarily is substantively different than "offline" hate speech, there are still distinct differences due to new technology challenges. One challenge is *anonymity*. Alexander Brown explains how anonymity can be linked to "freer speech", in which being anonymous can make more people express their opinions in public without having to fear negative responses based on characteristics like ethnicity, gender, or how they look. However, anonymity has also proved to be unfavorable, especially

in public debates. The internet permits users and content creators to be anonymous, which can make people to be "more outrageous, obnoxious, or hateful in the things they say (Branscomb, 1995: 1642-1643; cited in Brown, 2018, p.298-299).

This brings us further to *invisibility*, which represents the *physical distance* between people. For example, because of the distance between the speaker and the recipient, the speaker can distance him or herself from emotional og hurtful reactions. When writing discriminating and hurtful comments to someone from behind a keyboard, one cannot see the emotional hurt or anger from the other person. Evidence suggests that people tend to behave differently when there are no social cues, such as facial expressions, to remind them to behave differently (Citron, 2014: 59; cited in Brown, 2018, p.300). Brown also mentions the term *instantaneousness*, which refers to hate speech's ability to spread fast to a mass audience and like-minded people in a very short amount of time. The internet and social media has also been a strong driving force when it comes to making hate speech more visible, more available, and more persistent. He also points out how the internet "encourages" forms of hate speech that are spontaneous in the sense of being "instant responses, gut reactions, unconsidered judgements, off-the-cuff remarks, unfiltered commentary, and first thoughts" (Brown, 2018, p.304).

There is no doubt that the emergence of social media has had a positive impact on the democratic participation in the political debates. However it is also clear that it contributes to litter the society with hatred, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories. As Brown points out, social media makes hate speech more visible, available, and persistent, and Facebook debates are becoming much more polarized where extreme attitudes and opinions are being normalized. This brings us further to the people who generate hate speech comments. In the next section,

2.6   Previous study on hate speech senders

Although hate speech itself is not a new phenomenon, online hate speech is a relatively young field of study. In recent years, there has been more focus on research aimed towards hate speech *senders*, especially in pace with the growing the rise of European right-wing populist parties and right-wing extremists. For example, in 2012 Slovenian researchers Karmen

Erjavec and Melita Poler Kovačič conducted a textually-based critical discourse analysis on comment sections of three Slovenian news websites. The analysis was carried out on themes and keywords, and by analyzing key words, the authors were able to reveal content on a high textual level and establish what kind of terms and phrases that were frequently used in hate speech comments, who the comments were mainly targeted at, and what kind of news topics that would cause a lot of hate. Among other things, they found that hate speech comments would be far more prevalent on news items about internal politics, and hate speech comments would often target minority groups such as blacks, Roma, former groups from the Yugoslavia, homosexuals, Jews, and Muslims.

Their findings also showed that the senders would favor of only one side of a subject. Erjavic and Kovačič describe this as a "bipolar presentation" of the world, where the senders are extremely in favor of their own views, but totally reject "the other side" (Erjavic & Kovačič, 2012, p.905-906). In addition, the researchers also conducted 20 in-depth interview with hate speech senders in order to categorize their personalities. Among other things, their research strategy identified of four different hate speech categories, each motivated by different factors. The "soldiers", who belonged to political parties and non-governmental organizations, would use online means systematically to disseminate stereotypes and damage the reputation of their opponents. The "watchdogs" would use hate speech to draw attention to social problems. The "believers" would faithfully follow their political and ideological role models, and defend their political-ideological interests and attacking enemies. The fourth category was the "players" who would write hate speech comments out of boredom, or because it was some sort of funny game to them. This also refers to the term "trolling" (ibid, p.909-912).

In recent years, several reports and research papers on online hate speech have also been done in Norway in order to map the extent of it. For example in 2016, Institutt for Samfunnsforskning (ISF) launched three research reports on hate speech together with the government's strategy to prevent online hate speech. research project was funded by Justis- og Beredskapsdepartementet, and was carried out by Institutt for Samfunnsforskning (ISF). The reports have covered several aspects of online hate speech. In Report 1, Marjan Nadim and Audun Fladmoe carried out a review of relevant statistics and research on the nature and

extent of hate speech on the internet. Among other things, they found that the majority of hate speech senders on the internet were men who also expressed greater tolerance for hatred and sexual harassment than women (Ask et al., 2016; Hagen, 2015; cited in Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.42). A similar report called *Hatefulle ytringer i offentlig debatt på nett* was also published by LDO i 2018. The report was based on a quantitative content analysis with the purpose of mapping the scope of hate speech comments on NRK and TV2's Facebook page. Among other things, the analysis showed that about 7 percent of the comments were considered hateful, while 76 % of the comments were written by men, as opposed to 23% that were written by women (LDO, 2018, p.37) Similar findings were also were reported in *Kampen om sannheten* where Holter found that the senders she interviewed were men with an average age of around 55. Her research was based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 different hate speech senders (Holter, 2018, p.94)

In report 2, Helga Eggebø and Elisabeth Stubberud reviewed research that highlights the connection between hate speech and discrimination, bullying and violence. For example, they found that   minority groups were more often exposed to negative and offensive speech than the general population. Still, there were limitations when it comes to determining whether the offense would be discriminatory, which is an essential premise for classifying offensive speech as hate speech. The report also reviewed research that sheds light on consequences of hate speech, hate crime and offensive speech, and how it affect individuals, groups and the society as a whole (Eggebø & Stubberud, 2016, p.9). In report 3, Jon Wessel-Aas, along with Audun Fladmoe and Marjan Nadim, addressed the issue of the legal boundary between freedom of speech and hate speech.

When it comes to the senders' social background, the overall picture is more complex. While Potok (2016) claims that "the working class" is overrepresented among those who expresses hate online, other studies have also shown that people with relatively good positions in the society do the same (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015; Perry, 2001; cited in Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.42). In the VG's reportage *The internet warriors* (Nettkrigerne) from 2015, journalist Kyrre Lien traveled around Norway to meet 15 online debaters. By using text, videos, and still images, he wanted find out what makes these people so angry, and why they choose to write hateful comments and threat people. Out of the 15 internet warriors, it was clear that the working class was overrepresented, while 5 out of 15 were stated as "uføretrygded" (disabled

to work) (Lien, 2015). This may reflect Potok's claim about the working class being overrepresented among hat speech sender. Still, it might be difficult to create a concrete picture of the sender's social background as indications tell us that the social background can vary from country to country.

When it comes to ethnicity, LDO found that ethnic Norwegians were behind 95 percent of all hate speech comments, while other Western and non-Western senders made up respectively 3 and 1 percent of the comments. People who were most exposed to hate speech comments were ethnic minority groups and political active people (LDO, 2018, p.76). In particular, minority groups like Muslims, non-western immigrants and refugees are often seen as "less worth", evil enemies that threat the Western democracy (Holter, 2018). When it comes to topics and headlines, Erjavic and Koviačič found that hate speech comments dominated under news about domestic and foreign politics and criminal, national, sexual, and racial conflicts (Erjavic and Koviačič, 2012, p.907).

2.6.1 The growing hatred against Muslims

Because of the growing hatred and hate crimes against Muslims over the past decades, an academic interest in exploring the term "islamophobia", both from a theoretical and empirical perspectives has also emerged. Islamophobia is a term that that has come of age, especially in the wake of the terror attack 9/11 in 2001, and the European refugee crisis where the number of refugees strongly increased in the years leading up to 2015 (Bangstad, 2014, p.146). Hate speech targeted towards Muslims and Islam is often based on prejudices, conspiracy theories and alternative knowledge. Vasaasen brings in the argumentation how the «anti-Muslim culture» on Facebook establish its knowledge through ideas from social networks online, and ideas from the general population. Among other things, Muslims are often given dehumanizing characteristics based on the "threat" Islam represents, and they are automatically being seen as scapegoats for all the world's problems. A common feature is that Muslims in general are being labeled as *one* group where the idea that "all Muslims have evil and dangerous intentions" is a common mindset. Overall, their plan is to occupy and eradicate the Western society (Vasaasen, 2017, p.65).

In a British study of 100 different Facebook pages, components and post, the analysis found nearly 500 instances of hate speech targeted against Muslims. Overall, the study attempted to examine how Muslims are being portrayed on Facebook. Among other things, the research showed that Muslims often are being stereotyped and actual offline violence is being promoted as a means to target Muslim communities (Awan, 2016, p.17). The study took its point of departure from Facebook groups like Britain First and English Defense League, groups that share the same characteristics as Norwegian Defense League and SIAN. In these online environments, people would create a hostile environment where Muslim communities were targeted because of their race, faith, gender, and religious background. Here, words such as "scum", "rapists", and "terrorists" were frequently being used in describing Muslims (ibid, p.6).

It is clear that previous research shows that Muslims are, to a great extent, seen as the "main enemy" of the world and the biggest threat to the Western civilization. Overall, they are often labeled as *one* group where all Muslims acts the same and have the same evil intentions. This is also the dominating truth among right-wing radicals, which brings us further to the concept of "truth".

2.6.2 A combat for *truth*

As mentioned earlier, hate speech senders tend to have a strong intolerance or even hatred towards those who have different opinions or political views than themselves. They also tend to believe they are the *only ones* who know the real truth, and that everyone else is wrong (Erjavic and Koviačič, 2012, p.915). "Truth" is a central term when it comes to hate speech senders. To them, the alternative represents the *real* truth. In *Kampen om sannheten,* Holter demonstrated how the senders construct their own reality through narratives. Here, all interview subjects demonstrated their perception of reality through a counter-narrative realization against the society's master narrative. The senders own description of the society's value system, also called «the master narrative» states as following:

> [...] a socialist ideology or doctrine where immigration is an enrichment to the society and Islam is a peaceful religion, while aid, assistance to weak groups and legal protection against hate speech is morally correct. In this truth, Norway is also a functioning democracy, with a fair and inclusive freedom of speech. Those who criticize immigration and Islam are outright racists and extremists and must be left out of the public debate (Holter, 2018, p. 29).

The research also showed how the senders were using the counter -narrative to spread knowledge about truth and facts, in which the combat for truth could be interpreted as "enlightenment" (Holter, 2018). Similar findings were presented in *The Internet Warriors*. Here the senders generally demonstrated a strong need for promoting what they consider the truth, and to reveal lies and misinformation by politicians and mainstream media.

Existing knowledge about hate speech senders has been an important part of the theoretical approach to the thesis. As mentioned earlier, there has been an increase in research regarding hate speech *senders,* with focus on attitudes, racism, motivation factors, political beliefs. In regards with my own research, I have taken previous research findings into account. Overall, this thesis seeks to contribute to knowledge about hate speech senders in Norway from a discursive perspective, and uses discourse analysis to examine possible motivational factors behind such comments. By reading "between the lines", I wish to examine how the senders construct their reality perception and normative discourse through language. More about this in the next chapter.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the theoretical background of my thesis. First, I started by defining central terms such as "hate speech". Hate speech is the central term in this this thesis, and the definitions of what can be defined as hate speech, may vary from person to person. In this context, discussing the definition of hate speech has therefore been essential. Furthermore, I have discussed the democratization of the internet, the rise of the far-right on social media, the use of alternative media in the senders' construction of truth, and how it affects the political debate online in terms of boundary issues between hate speech and freedom of speech. I have also presented previous research and existing knowledge about senders behind hateful statements, and how this is relevant to my own study.

Now that I have discussed the theoretical framework, I will in the next chapter descuss the methodological approach to my own research. Here I will discuss research method linked to my research question, as well as selection of online newspapers, and selection criteria for hate

speech comments. Lastly, I will also talk about ethical guidelines in terms of internet research and research on other people.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I am going to address the methodological approach to my research. This study shares many of the goals of general empirical research, and is based on knowledge that is obtained through systematic observation and examination. Here I will discuss the research method, both discourse analysis as primary method and quantitative content analysis as secondary method. In this chapter I have also presented the implementation of data collection, which includes selection of newspapers and selection criteria for hate speech comments. At the end of the chapter I will discuss research ethics and ethical guidelines when using the internet as research tool. Here, I will also talk about confidentiality and privacy, and also discuss the need for participant's consent.

3.1 Method linked to the research question

Previous research shows that hate speech comments often can reflect the senders' level of knowledge, reality perception, (Holter, 2018) and political convictions (Erjavic & Koviačič, 2012). As my research centers around hate speech senders, using qualitative in-depth interviews as a starting point would have been natural in order to dig deeper into the sociological aspect: *why* and *what* motivates these people to express themselves the way they do. Yet I have chosen different approach to the research field. Through discourse analysis, I am going to use the *comments* themselves as a starting point, and look at the discursive features and characteristics of the senders' utterances. After going back and forth, I found that doing personal interviews would not only give me certain limitations in terms of the possible number of willing informants, but it could also end up as a time-consuming process. In addition, I was also skeptical about unpleasant and uncomfortable face-to-face meetings with informants, especially with me being a "minority". Overall, the goal with this research is to examine the discursive characteristics of hate speech comments in order to interpret its message and meaning, and to look at how the sender, through language, construct a counter-discourse. In the next section, I am going to discuss discourse analysis as primary research method and how using discourse analysis is going to help me answer my research question.

3.2 Discourse analysis as primary research method

This research takes its point of departure on news' below-the-line news comment section on Facebook. The methodical approach indicates observation of text, and in this analysis, I have focused on the senders' comments and analyzed them more detailed to examine the relationship between discourses and linguistic utterances. I have chosen discourse analysis as primary research method mainly reason because I think it is well suited for text analysis.

"Discourse" is the overall theme in this paper. Even though the term "discourse" itself may seem rather unclear, Nilsen describes discourse as "an important tool to understand and describe the relationship between the use of language and perceptions of reality" (Nilsen, 2014, p.16). In public debates, the discourse can for example show us how people structure their language when they speak, and how their language helps to confirm their understanding of certain issues or social groups. For example, if the language contains condescending and discriminating language towards a specific group, it may say something about the sender's notions and perceptions about that group. This tells us that some groups are considered better than others, and that some groups are considered inferior. One example is the senders' general hatred towards Muslims, and how hate speech on social media reflects the senders' Islamophobic attitudes against Muslims as humans. According to Nilsen (2014), these linguistic perspectives are drawn from the critical discourse analysis where a basic idea is that language in use can never be a neutral medium. This means that the person behind the utterances has a certain perspective and reality perception of the world. This is often reflected in their language, for example through specific word choices (ibid).

As mentioned, the background for this project is to examine the discursive characteristics of the sender's hate speech comments in news comment sections on Facebook. Here, the linguistic content has mainly involved hatred, racism, prejudice and discrimination, rhetoric, and reference to conspiracy theories. In the analysis, I want to examine how the senders are constructing an alternative discourse based on their reality perception. The alternative discourse can be seen as a "source of motivation" for publishing their comments online. Through discourse analysis, I will also get a general overview of the dynamics of the online debate, gain more knowledge about the senders themselves, and the meaning and message behind their utterances. Apart from the linguistic discourse, In such context, it has also been

important to document demographic factors, in order to draw a more comprehensive image of who the senders are. This brings us further to the secondary research method, which is the quantitative content analysis.

3.3   Secondary research method: Content analysis

The methodological approach to the secondary research method is quantitative content analysis. This method is widely used in media research and is often used to analyze web content and social media to map the messages that are being communicated (Krippendorff, 2012; cited in Nadim, Fladmoe & Enjolras, 2018, p.40). Content analysis can briefly be defined as "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics, which includes both human-coded analyses and computer-aided text analyses" (Neuendorf, 2016, p.19).

Quantitative is a method that is often being used in media research to analyze content. The method is mainly used to analyze content on websites, including social media, where the purpose is to map and analyze messages that are communicated (LDO, 2018, p.27). In this research, I have used content analysis to map the following: the overall scope of hate speech comments in news comment sections on Facebook, and to examine Statistical and demographic factors among the senders, with emphasis on gender, age, and ethnicity. The analysis has taken its starting point in a total amount of 3572 comments sampled from TV2, Nettavisen, and Dagbladet's below-the-line comment sections on Facebook. The analysis was sampled in a random time period of six weeks where the news image was not dominated by certain events or issues.

Because the analysis is limited to three newspapers, the overall results will not say anything about the general debate climate on Facebook, or the total scope of hate speech comments on Facebook in general. Nevertheless, by conducting an analysis of some of the most established news pages on Facebook, I believe that we can still get an overall picture of how the Norwegian political debates on Facebook look like (LDO, 2018).

3.4   Implementation of data collection

The starting point of this study has been the *uncensored* comments, in other words comments that have not been deleted due to policies on hate speech, harassment, and bullying. Because of this, I decided to collect the comments no earlier than 24 hours after the news article was posted. By doing it that way, both the newspaper's moderator and Facebook would have had enough time to remove the comments, and people would have had time to actually comment. I believe this helps to create a realistic image of the debate culture itself, how below-the-line comment sections can unfold, what type of comments that are posted, and what is actually allowed to be published on news Facebook pages. The analysis period was selected regardless of news image.

3.4.1 Selection criteria for the comments

First of all, I chose comments based on their stigmatizing and discriminating content. This means, comments where the language contained a strong sense of hatred, contempt, discrimination, and racism towards certain groups or individuals. An example is how certain minority groups were described by using stigmatizing and dehumanizing words and adjectives such as "rapists", "scum", "freeloaders", «criminals», and "shit". I also included comments that contained a message that highlighted ethnic or cultural minority groups as less worthy or subhuman. These comments were often targeted against Muslims, Islam, cultural practices, and cultural conflict. In such examples, Muslims were often referred to as "underdeveloped" and "unable" to integrate, where some senders also referred to biological factors and differences.

The second criterion was comments that demonstrated strong characteristics of war rhetoric. In such comments, the senders expressed a distinct image of a conflict-oriented reality, with clear ideas about who the enemies are and what needs to be done (Holter, 2018, p.7). In such context, everyone who were considered "foreign" and "different" were depicted as dangerous and threatening and had to be defeated. In addition there were the "internal" enemies such as politicians and mainstream media. In this context, politicians were described as traitors who work *against* their own people. Words such as "islamization", "invasion", "occupation", "traitors", and "war" were often being used.

The third criterion was comments that showed strong characteristics of underlying and established conspiracy theories. For example when "Tore" claims that «Muslims want to take over Europe", when "Ragnar" states that "politicians want to inaugurate Islamic culture in our society", or when "Berit" accuses mainstream media for spreading lies and left-wing propaganda. In such conspiracy theories, the senders also construct the idea of victimization. Here the senders talk about "the reverse racism" carried out by "dark-skinned people" who come to Norway and hate white people", how politicians turn ethnic Norwegians into "victims" in their own country by deprioritizing their own people, and how the media *only* write about racism targeted against foreigners, while racism targeted against whites is deliberately being omitted.

3.4.2 Analyzing the comments: The steps

The analysis itself mainly consisted of monitoring and reviewing news comment sections on Facebook every day over a period of approximately six weeks. During this period, I experienced the scope of hate speech comments to vary greatly depending on media coverage and "breaking news". To make the process less time consuming, I deliberately decided to exclude certain news articles. These articles mainly contained "positive" news where the chance of detecting hate speech was slim to none. Examples were articles regarding sports, the weather, food, travel guides etc.

The definition of *what* hate speech is might depends on who you ask. In legal terms, an utterance must be directed towards a person's skin color, national or ethnic background, religion or life stance, sexual orientation, or disability in order for it to be defined as hate speech (Lovdata, n.d., §185). Still, I have decided to take LDO's (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet) expanded definition of «hate speech» (see page 16) into consideration in the research analysis. Based on LDO's expanded definitions, the comments had to meet the pre-selected criteria discussed in previous section. The selected comments were further transferred to Word and read carefully. I decided to keep three different word documents, one for each newspaper. In each document, I registered all the selected news items along with the date they were published. In each news item, the total number of comments overall as well as the total number of *hate* comments was registered. Here, the sender's names were also saved along with their comments.

With regard to the content analysis, I decided to make a separate document stored in Excel. Here I retrieved the sender's name, which had been previously registered in Word along with their comments. The senders were then divided by gender. After putting all of the senders' name in Excel, the biggest job remained, namely to go through all the registered Facebook profiles. To make the process shorter and easier, I had pre-stored the sender's name in Word as a hyperlink. By clicking on their name, I was directly "redirected" to their Facebook profile. The hyperlink made the process of recording relevant information about the senders such as name, place of residence, age, and ethnicity much easier (as far as possible, of course).

When it comes to the senders' age, I decided to focus age groups instead of using their exact age. First of all, several user profiles showed clear characteristics of a so-called «trolling profile». On such profiles, the user had either come up with an absurd "name" that obviously was meant as a joke, or the pictures mainly consisted of "memes" or pictures of famous people. Secondly, some of the user profiles had not specified their age, or they kept their profile private so that demographic information would not be available to the public. In such context, a survey to register the senders' exact age would have required participant's consent according to privacy and NESH's guidelines (NESH, 2019). Based on this, I decided to do an "estimated age calculation" instead, with focus on five different age groups. Each age group had its own color code. In other words, the sender's exact age was not essential, but rather being able to place them in an *estimated* age group.

3.4.3 Choice of online newspapers

Initially, I was a little uncertain about the choice of online newspapers I should use as a starting point. The choices mainly stood between mainstream media (VG, NRK etc.) and alternative media (Resett, Document etc.) Much suggests that these alternative news sites are helping to "fuel" racism and hate speech. Among other things, Resett has on several occasions been strongly criticized for running an overt right-wing and anti-immigration agenda, for anonymizing sources, and for "allowing" discriminatory and "racist" comments in their comment section. As mentioned earlier, alternative newspapers. As mentioned earlier, these alternative news sites generally attract a certain type of audience, which are mostly people who share the same political ideas. This often leads to an extended echo chamber effect where

the diversity of opinions is rather limited. Although Resett's comment section initially would be very interesting, I decided to do mainstream media instead. In mainstream media, the public debate is more versatile and the opinion opposition is stronger, which makes the debate more interesting.

When it comes to choosing newspapers, I decided to do the analysis on TV2, Nettavisen and Dagbladet. The reason I chose three instead of just one was primarily because I wanted a bigger scope of the comments. Another reason was because I wanted to examine if the boundary between "free speech" and censorship varied from newspaper to newspaper. Although these newspapers were randomly selected for the most part, I was still eager to analyze Nettavisen's comment section. Earlier this year, it was known that Nettavisen followed Dagbladet's decision to remove their below-the-line comment section on their news website, as a result of habits of bad debate culture. Like Dagbladet, they also decided to move the debate to Facebook. Overall, I have had the impression that Nettavisen's "migration" to Facebook has not really changed the tone in their comment section, and that the bad debate culture is still a problem. Traditionally, Nettavisen has always stood firmly in the principle of free speech, and is a newspaper that has dared to challenge the debate by making "engaging" and "provocative" headlines, especially when it comes to issues tied to immigration and Islam. I have previously experienced the Nettavisen as liberal when it comes to censorship of comments. I have had the overall impression that Nettavisen is one of the most liberal newspapers when it comes to censoring comments.

The other newspapers I decided to include in my analysis was TV2 and Dagbaldet. A report from 2017 made by LDO showed that 200 out of 2000 comments that were posted on NRK and TV2's Facebook-page were considered hate speech comments, in other words 1 of 10 ("Én av ti ytringer," 2017). I have still had the impression that TV2 generally runs a fairly moderated debate where the threshold for what is considered acceptable to write is lower than for example at Nettavisen. When it comes to Dagbladet, I mainly chose it because it is one of the most read newspapers in Norway. For other reasons, I have had no particular impression of their comment section.

Now that I have addressed the methodological approach to my research, it is also important to discuss ethical guidelines of internet-research, especially when it comes to researching other

people. In the next section I will discuss research ethics and ethical guidelines which includes confidentiality, privacy, and the need for participant's consent.

3.5   Research ethics

In pace with the internet's fast development, internet research has strongly increased. According to The national research ethical committee in social science and humanities (NESH), internet research includes:

> […] research *on* the Internet as a phenomenon, its structure and technology, *the use of* the Internet as a tool in research (data collection and information via informants, survey, archives, logs, algorithms), as well as research on production, communication and interaction *via* the internet or cell phone (by using e-mail, social media, blogs, discussion forums, debate sites, comment sections, or by using computer games, search engines, and websites (NESH, 2014, p.4).

By using internet as a tool in research, there are also ethical guidelines that must be taken into account. The purpose of research ethical guidelines is to help provide ethical reflection and dilemmas, to promote ethical discretion and reflection, and to prevent scientific dishonesty. According to NESH, there are certain ethical guidelines that generally must be followed to ensure that the research is done in a "fair" manner. Especially when it comes so research on social media, the boundary between what is considered public and what is considered private has caused an ethical dilemma. NESH's guidelines state that:

> [...] as a general rule, the researchers are responsible to inform the research participants (NESH 2016: B.7) and, by using sensitive personal information, obtain consent (NESH 2016: B.8). The guidelines also state that there are a number of exceptions to this general rule, including observation in open arenas, streets and squares (NESH 2016: B.7). Other exceptions to the requirement of consent are research on public figures (NESH 2016: B.7), or on private companies and organizations (NESH 2016: B.19, as cited in NESH, 2019, p.9).

Such general rules and exceptions need to be further specified when it comes to internet research. In addition, the boundary between what is considered private and what is considered public must be taken into account. When it comes my own research, it is based on newspapers' public comment section on Facebook. From my interpretations, I would say that public comment sections on Facebook where collective exchanges of opinions are made can be defined as a "public space". According to NESH, there is a "smooth transition from

particularly sensitive information presented privately in closed online forums to general information presented in a public arena aimed towards a wide audience" (NESH, 2019, p.10). Anyone with a Facebook account can follow any news pages on Facebook and everyone is free to comment below the news articles. In addition, Facebook cannot be seen as inherently private. According to Facebook's privacy guidelines, privacy control how your profile information and content is shared with other users. However, public information can be seen by anyone, including people outside Facebook, and those you are not friends with. Facebook's website, the following statement is presented:

> When you choose to share something publicly, it is considered public information. Facebook pages and public groups are public places. Anyone who can see the page or group can see your posts or comments. When you post or comment on a page or in a public group, an event can generally be published in the news feed as well as elsewhere on or outside Facebook (retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/help/ 203805466323736, 2019).

Public Facebook pages do neither have access restrictions nor do they require a password. The only thing that is required for participating in Facebook debates is to have a user profile. Such profile does not even have to be real, and everyone with a fake profile are just as "welcome" to join. Traditionally, newspapers have also been a central arena for public debate, and the transfer to social media has in many ways expanded the democratic reasoning that "everyone should be able to contribute" in the public debate. Based on this, in addition to both NESH's and Facebook's guidelines, I argue that consent from the participants are not necessary. The argument is also based upon what NESH calls *the expected public.* This is limited to research that does not violate "the informants' understanding or expectation that information and communication is public (for example, political debate in open forums aimed at a general public)» (NESH, 2019, p.10). It further states that the researcher has an independent responsibility for considering what the reasonable criteria for expected publicity are (ibid, p.10). As I have understood NESH's guidelines, the researcher must evaluate and decide what the reasonable criteria for consent are. I therefore believe that research on certain types of communication on social media, such as posting in open and public groups or news comment sections on Facebook may be conducted without requiring any form of consent from the participants.

3.5.1 Confidentiality: How to secure participant's anonymity

According to NESH, there are certain guidelines that need to be followed when it comes to privacy. Among other things, NESH requires that:

> [...] the researcher shall treat collected information about personal conditions(s) confidential. Personal information shall usually be deidentified, while publication and dissemination of research material shall usually be anonymous. Personal information should usually be de-identified, while the publication and dissemination of the research material should usually be anonymized (NESH, 2016, p.16).

This is to protect people's privacy and to avoid unreasonable burdens and harm to the people who are being investigated. Since it is possible to look up specific quotes in the search engine to find out who the participant is, it is therefore very important that I ensure that a quote shall not be directly linked to a the person so that he or she can be identified.

To avoid violating NESH's confidentiality guidelines, I have given the senders pseudo names. By using pseudo names, I make sure the senders remain anonymous, and that a specific comment cannot be traced back to them. As a Nordic Media student, I was also required to write my paper in English, which has made the confidentiality issue a lot easier. In the process of translating all data material from Norwegian to English, I have also had to re-phrase and re-write words and sentences that are difficult to translate directly. Because of this, tracking the original Norwegian post back to the senders is therefore going to be very difficult. In addition, I did not include news headlines, and removed dialect words and rephrased incoherent words that made no sense. I also cut down on sentences in the senders' quotes where possible.

3.5.2 Reflections on the analysis

Online hate speech is a phenomenon I have been interested in for a long time, much because of a genuine interest in extremism and tribal culture. To me, below-the-line comment sections themselves have always been more exciting than the news article itself no matter topic. After I watched the documentary "The Internet Warriors" by Kyrre Lien from 2015, my interest in the field was significantly enhanced, and when I started my master's degree program in the fall of 2017, I was already quite confident in my thesis and choice of topic. Although the interest in the field was strong, I had at that stage limited academic knowledge about hate

speech senders and discourse theory. Still, as a media student and a person who is being interested in politics and society, I have over the past few years had a more critical look at online debate, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and established reality perceptions.

In the next chapter I will present findings and analysis from my analysis. With discourse analysis as the primary research method, the analysis has, among other things, put emphasis on the sender's use of language, their reality perception, the construction an alternative discourse. Overall, the approach will show the relationship between language, perception of reality, and discourse.

4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I am going to present the findings from my research. I will first start with presenting findings from the secondary research method (content analysis), and then I will discuss findings from the discourse analysis. The discourse analysis has put emphasis on the linguistic content in the senders' comments with focus on the relationship between language, reality perception and discourse. here I have mainly discussed the senders' construction of the counter-discourse with strong focus on the enemies. In this analysis, I have used many of the senders' hate speech comments as examples throughout the chapter, where I have done an analysis with regards to theory.

4.1   Overview of newspapers' comment section

As mentioned earlier, I had the overall impression that Nettavisen would have the most liberal viewpoint on moderation and censorship. Still, I felt that it was Dagbladet's comment sction that contained the ugliest and most hateful comments. Accoring to my findings, it was also pretty clear that Dagbladet was the newspaper in which the readers generally distrusted the most. The analysis showed that Dagbladet's readers displayed a big amount of distrust and dissatisfaction in both the newspaper's content and the journalistic angle. Dagbladet was accused of being run by socialists and left-wing journalists, and to deliberately spread lies and propaganda to a much greater extent than both TV2 and Nettavisen.

> Dagbladet again....With its agenda and propaganda.... Who believes them?? No...
> They turn and twist everything.... And feeds the population with bullshit. – *"Olga"*

Both tone and dynamic in Dagbladet's comment section was far more aggressive than both Nettavisen and TV2. I also got the impression that Dagbladet was most liberal when it came to censorship of hate speech, which I think was quite unexpected given Nettavisen's strong principle of free speech and diverse opinions. Below is a table that shows the results for all three newspapers: the total number of comments versus the total number of comments that met the selection criteria.

Tabell 1. *Overview of the newspapers' comment sections*

Newspaper	Nettavisen	TV2 Nyhetene	Dagbladet
The total number of comments	1679	1211	2447
Comments that met the selection criteria	95 (5,7%)	79 (6,5%)	170 (6,9%)

The table shows the total number of comments and comments that met the selection criteria. By looking at the table, indications tells us that Dagbladet is the newspaper with most readers. The total number of comments is over twice as much as TV2, and about 30 percent higher than Nettavisen. Because of Dagbladet's popularity, it did not come as surprise that the newspaper also had the highest percentage of comments that met the selection criteria. Yet the table also shows us that the number of hate speech comments was quite low compared to for example TV2. Taking readership and popularity into consideration, it would have been natural that the difference between Dagbladet and other newspapers would quite bigger. Still, I still found the overall dynamics and the tone of Dagbladet's comment section to be much "harder" than the other two newspapers. Here the comments were far worse and the polarization even clearer.

The next step in the analysis is the quantitative content analysis. Before stepping into the main section, which is the discourse analysis, I will first summarize relevant demographic factors conducted in the content analysis

4.2 Secondary research method: Findings

As briefly mentioned in the introduction chapter, the research consists of two parts: discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis. Based on findings from previous research and reports, it has been essential for my own thesis examine the scope of hate speech in news comment sections on Facebook, and also to uncover the senders' demographic features such

as gender, age and ethnicity. Overall, I wanted to create a more comprehensive picture of the senders before I take my research further to the main part, which is the discourse analysis. linguistic analysis is the focus. I will hereby start by presenting findings from the demographic-based content analysis.

4.2.1 The total scope of recorded comments

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, I conducted an analysis of TV2, Nettavisen, and Dagbladet's below-the-line comment sections. The implementation itself was conducted through observation in the period between February 25 and April earlier this year. Overall, the analysis consisted of a total number of 36 news articles. Even though the number of articles was rather small, the overall amount of analyzed comments was 5337, including comment replies. As certain articles did cause tremendous engagement, some comment sections consisted of nearly 400 comments alone. Of all the 5337 comments, 344 comments met the selected criteria for "hate speech comments", in other words 6,6 percent. The criteria were based on the following points: 1) comments where the language contained a strong sense of hatred, contempt, discrimination, and racism towards certain groups or individuals, 2) comments that demonstrated strong characteristics of war rhetoric, and 3) comments that showed strong characteristics of underlying and established conspiracy theories (see p. 34).

4.2.2 Gender, age groups, and ethnicity

Earlier in this thesis I talked about how previous research findings indicated that men more often than women were behind online hate speech (Ask et al., 2016; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016), and that Facebook debates in general were dominated by men (Lien, 2015). Such claims seem to correspond with my own findings. Out of the 344 hate speech comments, 278 senders were registered. 70 of these senders were women while 208 were men, almost four times as many. Previously, I also discussed my role as a "listener" and as a "non-participating observer". In order to avoid participant's consent (NESH, 2016), I decided to do an "estimated age calculation" instead of gathering the senders' exact age through a survey. By clicking on the senders' profile and looking at their profile picture and other pictures available, I was able to roughly estimate an approximate age of the senders. From my point of view, it is quite obvious whether a person is in their 20-30s or in the 50-60s. Still, in some cases it could be difficult to link a certain age to a simple profile picture. To make the approximate calculation more credible, I therefore chose to concentrate on four age groups

with relatively large dispersion. On a regular basis, I also found that several senders kept personal details like date of birth and year of birth as public information. In such cases, I was able to record the sender's exact age. In other words, the sender's exact age was not essential, but rather being able to place them in an *estimated* age group. To illustrate this, I created a table where different age groups have different color codes. The red group (unknown) represents people whose age was impossible to assume due to privacy settings, or due to an obvious "troll" account.

Table 2. *The estimated age groups versus the total number of senders.*

Estimated age groups	0-20	20-40	40-60	60+	Unknown
The number of senders	1	27	112	85	53

The table shows that the majority of the hate speech senders, apart from the unknown-group (red), consists of middle aged people, and that the average age is 56 years. With that said, I do not think that such estimated calculation alone is precise enough to ascertain a legitimate research result, and that we still need more concrete research on the participants' age. Nevertheless, I believe that the estimated calculation can give a relatively general overview of which age group is behind the most of the hate speech comments that can be found in news comment sections Facebook.

By also taking other previous research findings into account, I argue that my findings can be considered legitimate. For example, in 2015 Lien pointed out that the "Facebook debate" had an average age of 39, and consisted of 59% men and 41% women. Another example is Holter's interviews with hate speech senders who all were men with an average age of approximately 55 (Holter, 2018, p?). Nevertheless, previous research has also showed an ambiguous images of the senders' age. Among other things, a previous study in the US shows that the profile of 169 people who were convicted of hate crime in Boston were

overrepresented by young people. This was specifically applied to serious cases, and the age profile appeared to be more prevalent in less serious cases. For example, a study of racial harassment and violence found that all age groups were involved (McDevitt, Levin, & Bennett, 2002; cited in Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016, p.42). That said, these studies are not specifically related to online comment sections, and the general use of the internet and social media among young people may therefore provide a more ambiguous image of hate speech senders. Although there is need for more specific research on the senders' age, I still argue that the majority the hate speech senders in news comment sections on Facebook tend to be over-represented by middle-aged men somewhere between 40 and 60 years old.

When it comes the senders' ethnicity or national background, I used the same estimated calculation-method as for the senders age. As a "listener" and "observer" (NESH, 2016), I was only able to use the information that was available. It was difficult to determine the senders exact ethnicity or national background by only looking at the senders' Facebook profile. Because of this, I used two very general subcategories in order to record the approximate ethnic affiliation, which included 1) Western and) non-Western. Here, I did estimations based on the senders' name and appearance. For the unknown-group, I was not able to register the sender's ethnicity due to the same reasons why I was not able to register their age. For the remaining 225, I found that only 1,8 percent of the senders could be considered "non-Western", or "foreign". The rest of the senders fell into the category first category. The "Westerns" accounted for 98,2 percent of the senders. Still it is difficult to determine whether or not these people would be put in the category, "Ethnic Norwegians". Although, one can assume that 98,2 percent of the debates were dominated by Norwegians. Although my overall findings is a bit too general, I still thinks it represents a realistic picture of how the ethnicity is distributed.

4.2.3 Topics and target groups

Hate speech is often built on negative stereotypes, prejudices and stigmas, and often plays on unfounded fear, contempt for what is considered different, notions of nature-given hierarchies, and rhetoric of exclusion (LDO, 2018, p.39). When it comes to news topics and headlines that would most likely cause the eruption of hateful utterances in the comment sections, it did not come as a surprise that news about Muslims and Islam caused a tremendous amount of anger and engagement, followed by immigration, refugee- and asylum

policy. In many cases, Muslim immigrants and other minority group (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants etc.) were pointed as guilty of cases involving crime such as rape, stabbing, and murder. For example, in cases involving crime such as robbery, rape, and murder, the senders were generally quick to point their finger on one of these groups, even though suspects were not mentioned. Hate speech comments targeted specifically at refugees were mainly about how they "abuse" the Norwegian system by "taking" money and benefits from the state without even working or integrating. These groups were usually referred to as freeloaders, fake and dishonest people.

On the other hand, Islam, was often accused of being the root of all evil, for posing a threat to the European stability, and for being an "underlying driving force" for why Muslims behave and act the way they do. The sender's overall ability to distinguish between *Islamist* and *ordinary Muslims* was almost nonexistent. The comment below illustrates a typical example of this:

> [...] Muslims want to take over Europe, and they use parts of the elite to reach their goals. Muslims are first and foremost loyal to Islamic laws and therefore disloyal to Norwegian/European values. Muslims cannot be integrated because they really don't want to. Muslims bring their faith, their values and their culture when they come to Norway. – *"Oscar"*

One of the subtopics that also generated verbal outburst in the comment sections was news about "IS-children" and "IS-women". In short, the topic is mainly about radicalized young women who have left Norway (or other western countries) to join IS (ISIS). During their stay they have given birth to one or more children, and they now regret their decisions and want to return. Normative questions about "whether or not Norway should help those who voluntarily left" and "if Norway are responsibility for their innocent children" has been a controversial topic in the news scene and the public debate, and these women and children have received a lot of hate in Facebook debates.

When it comes to other topics, hate speech comments on news about internal politics, especially on issues that concerned immigration and integration, the government's state budget and saving measures, disagreements between politicians (especially between "the left" and "the right"), and climate politics was far more prevalent. In these cases, "unpopular"

politicians were extensively accused for treason and corruption and for being naïve and stupid. Many hate speech comments against politicians were targeted at individuals. For example, several comments were aimed at prime minister Erna Solberg, where she, along with her cabinet, were accused of treason, Muslim invasion, and for failing their own people. Among other things, she was often referred to as "Muslim-Erna" and "Muslim-lover", and "fake". Other comments were generally targeted towards politicians being naïve, incompetent, and stupid.

In addition, Mainstream media was also seen as the second antagonist, as many believe that there is a secret "collaboration" between politicians and mainstream media. Here, mainstream journalists were often accused of lying, being corrupt, and spreading fake news. An example is the sender's claim about how scientists along with mainstream media are lying about the climate crisis. The analysis has shown that climate politics is topic that evokes strong emotions and a lot of anger, and hate speech comments and severe harassment have been targeted at both MDG-politician and environmental activist Lan Marie Berg and Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. One of the comments aimed at berg read as follows:

> That woman is ok to look at, and I wouldn't have said say anything if one of my sons found a daughter in-law like that. But she is EVIL and thoughtless. She is brainwashed with CO2 arguments that are all lies, and she has no thought for negative consequences for anyone but herself. Total ego! Too bad people like her are climbing the political ladder. They are destroying the society. – *"Otto"*

When it comes to hate speech directed towards gender, I had the overall impression that gender did not really matter. In my opinion, it has seemed like the utterances have been rather based on people's actions, opinions or political stance. An example is the senders' opponents of the debate who are strongly exposed to harassment and hateful utterances. For example, many comments have been targeted towards "leftists" and socialists. Gender has therefore been less relevant in this context. When it comes to harassment and hate speech pointed at individuals like politicians or "well-known" people, the comments have been mostly based on something they have either said or done, or what they look like. In all media analyzed, I did not register any hate speech comments towards homosexuals either. On the positive side, this may indicate that attitudes in general towards may have changed in pace with the "modern society". On the other hand, there may be random reasons for this, for example due to the lack

of news outlets covering topics concerning homosexuality or gay rights during my analysis period.

The quantitative content analysis has provided me with relevant, demographic factors when it comes to hate speech senders, target groups (enemies) and [topics]. Among other things, the analysis shows that men are behind the majority of the hate speech comments, and that they have an average age of between 50 and 60 years. It also shows that the senders almost solely are represented by Norwegians or people of western background (98,2 percent). Other findings also indicate that hate speech is to a large extend targeted towards minority groups, with Muslims starring as the most "dangerous" enemy. On the other hand, there is hate speech targeted towards "internal enemies", who mainly consist of politicians, commercial mass media, and socialists. This brings is further to the main part of the research, which is the discourse analysis. In this part, I will focus on the sender's *comments*, and examine the linguistic features and the relationship between language and discourse.

4.3   Primary research method: Discourse analysis

In relation to the thesis's primary research method, discourse analysis has been used to answer the following question: *"What are the discursive characteristics of hate speech comments in news comment sections online?"* This part of the research has put emphasis on the linguistic content in the senders' comments with focus on the relationship between language, reality perception and discourse. "Counter-discourse" has been general theme in the analysis, with focus on the senders' understanding of the society and perception of reality. Primary data, which consists of ten selected comments forms the very basis of the analysis. What these comments have in common is that they contain stigmatization, discrimination or labeling of a social group based on ethnic, religious or cultural affiliation, metaphors, rhetoric, reference to conspiracy theories, and encourage to violence.

The table below represents the selected comments which is the primary data. The comments are retrieved from all of the three newspapers, and are written by both men and women. I have highlighted certain words, phrases and sentences with bold font that I found quite interestin.

In addition to primary data, I will also use randomly selected comments from the data collection as examples throughout the analysis.

Table 3. Primary data: *selected comments from TV2, Dagbladet, and Nettavisen.*

The senders	Selected comments
"Vetle"	**Just get her hanged as fast as possible. She shall be executed,** not be sent to Norway. Her children are not our responsibility. **If you have had any connection with IS, you should be killed,** regardless of citizenship. **Islamists are worthless cockroaches who have renounced their right to exist on planet Earth.** **If any of these pigs manage, against all odds, to get back to our territory, I hope there are patriotic Norwegians out there to make the process short.** Doubt that the police even bother to investigate! It's called **cleansing** and **garbage disposal! Let's annihilate these pigs!** Long live the naivety! **These are not humans, these are rats, biological garbage** that needs to be removed. **They have no right whatsoever to exist on the same planet as us and breathe in the same oxygen as us.** It is important that **responsible people get up and kill the remaining scum** that escaped Donald Trump's amazing bombs
"Turid"	Everyone who comes from the third world are overjoyed to be here. **Free money is transferred into their account every month, and they have to do nothing but produce more children, and their account gets bigger for each child.** To them, Norway is a gold mine. **They send their children to free kindergarten and just relax and enjoy life and their hobbies. They beg for more free stuff for their children and they receive it.** Not many people get everything they demand without using magic tricks

"Olav"	Enrichment !? **Seeing the words «immigrant" and "enrichment" in the same sentence makes me sick to my stomach!** No one can say that all the immigration to Europe over the past few years is an enrichment for the countries that are stuck with this garbage. Just look at the **tremendous increase in knife crime,** especially in Oslo. **Car fires, rape, robbery, violence, all kinds of crime.** So no, this is not an enrichment.
"Henning"	Islam is not a religion after all. It is an **extremely dogmatic, oppressive and totalitarian misanthropic** ideology...
"Kent-Roger"	**Us whites are being robbed, killed and raped by immigrants we have let into the country,** given protection, social security and housing. Now these **primates have started to set fire to our cars too. It is time to build a wall against Sweden and arm ourselves**
"Robert"	Truth is that **Muslims rape far more than Norwegians.** Not only when it comes to sexual assault, but **in all categories**
"Preben"	Well It's okay for politicians to say no to begging. They should think about themselves as social parasites (samfunnsnytere). They sit at the parliament and scratch their balls while **figuring out new fees and committing treason and other crimes. Their immigration policy is treason. These so-called refugees are allowed to wreak havoc unpunished. They are allowed to commit rape unpunished.** There are already areas where the police dare not enter. **They get social benefits and economic support for free.** If us natives ask for the same, then suddenly there are budget issues. **One day they are going to take over this country.** BECAUSE OF THE **TRAITORS AT THE PARLIAMENT**
	The leftists can't get enough of murder and rape, not to mention new welfare clients and abusers of the

"Bjørn"	**disability pension (trygdemisbrukere) in Norway. They must be driven by intense hatred of themselves, their own children, and their neighbors.** Thought they would learn from seeing what is happening in Sweden and France now, but no..
"Thomas"	Thickheaded (Nedsnødde) DB!!!! **When I ask Norwegians about this, 9 out of 10 say that Islam is about to destroy the West ! I don't put words in their mouths like DB !!** DB will soon piss their pants together with the rest of MSM when you see all the bullshit you have created ! **You are a bunch of fucking TRAITORS !!!!!!** SSB and DB both represent the same shit, **DB is doing just like the lying media all around Europe, rolling out the red carpet and protecting the world's most dangerous ideology !** The majority is sleeping and will not understand the consequences before it's too late .
"Gry"	**Refugees have no respect for other people's values.... They demolish their own country and keep spreading their dirtiness in other countries....** My ancestors built this land, but that is something refugees don't understand.. It's just tragic

4.3.1 Construction of a counter-discourse: The truth

In this section I will discuss the senders' construction of the counter-discourse itself, in which the senders also consider to be the *truth*. As mentioned before, the counter-discourse is made up by some kind of a plot put together of the senders' beliefs, reality perception, and conspiracy theories, and acts as a counter pole to the hegemonic and public discourse.

After having analyzed over 300 comments, a common feature was that the senders had an extremely hostile and one-sided attitude towards the public discourse, and the society in general. This attitude was often demonstrated by accusing the hegemonic discourse for being a product of the political governance between corrupt politicians, state actors, socialist and the media. For example, in the public discourse, immigration is an enrichment for the society,

Islam is a peaceful religion, and Norway is also a functioning democracy with strong protections of free speech (Holter, 2018, p.29). In the counter-discourse, on the other hand, immigration has solely led to increased violence, crime, and rape, Muslims are evil and dangerous enemies who need to be defeated, and freedom of speech in Norway is reserved for "those on the left" and the politically correct.

Another interesting finding was the senders' general persuasive conspiracy theory that politicians, along with commercial media, are part of a plot in which their goal is to "destroy" the Norwegian society. This is done by "allowing" Muslim overtake, and letting Norway be "invaded" by non-western immigrants, refugees and migrants. For example, by "enriching" the society with refugees and Muslim immigrants, the politicians are *deliberately* replacing Christianity and Norwegian culture with Islam. They intentionally also put ethnic Norwegians in danger because of Muslim's violent and barbaric demeanor. Still, this *truth* is not covered by the media, much because of media's and politicians' scheme to hide the truth from Norwegians. The following comment illustrates this conspiratorial mindset:

> Ghettos are formed where ethnic Norwegians and integrated immigrants escape from. Cars have gone from high quality to low quality. Immigrant youth gangs terrorize communities and schools and nobody is lifting a finger to stop this. Maybe if the media had done their job and informed about both sides of immigration, the number would've been different. They only mention the positive sides but intentionally leave out the negative sides. Many people are not aware of this. – *«Ole»*

The counter-discourse itself is driven by a plot where the thematic core of the discourse is the senders' concept of *truth*. This is considered to be *the absolute* and truth, in which they also believe is the *only* truth for everyone else as well. In short, the counter-discourse can be seen as an attempt to delegitimize the public discourse, and as a motivation factor behind the senders' publication the comments. The discourse analysis has also showed how language helps to confirm the senders' understanding of the outside world. Their perception of the world can be described as rather black and white. In their reality, there is only *one* truth, *their* truth, and everyone else is wrong, By having such perceptions of the society, the counter-discourse and the public discourse are put up against each other as «true and false» and «right and wrong» where there is no middle ground.

The analysis also shows that many senders share the reality perception that we are "at war".

Here they put a strong emphasis on distinguishing between "the good" and "the bad", where they form a clear image of who the enemies in the society are. The senders image of the enemy is something I will get back to this image later on in this chapter. First, I will start by discussing how the alternative media helps to construct the senders' reality and truth, and how the alternative media functions as an interpretative unit.

4.3.2 Alternative media as an interpretative community

I earlier talked about the senders' relationship to alternative media, that they generally show a great mistrust in both politicians and mainstream media, and often seek to alternative sources for facts and information. I also discussed that many senders *only* use right-wing alternative media as references, much do to their strong right-wing position and immigration-critical stance. For example, Resett and Document are both examples of legitimate news sources that represents the *real* truth, as opposed to mainstream media that based on left-wing propaganda. So can we see in this comments:

> Bla bla bla -- Dagbladet - Unnecessary to say anything more about these who are educated to distort the truth and facts about things that don't suit them..!!, – "*Sam"*

In this statement, "Sam" claims that Dagbladet's journalistic practice is based on distorting facts and hiding the truth. He also believes that their journalists are *purposely* deceiving their readers, and that they are writing about whatever suits them.

In addition to using alternative media as source of information, it also functions as some kind of interpretative community. Many senders find that mainstream media does not match their own beliefs and opinions, which might cause a situation characterized by alienation and the feeling of being excluded. By solely referring to mainstream as left-biased, propaganda, and fake news, the senders are only seeking alternative information that conforms their own theories and beliefs. This can be explained as a so-called *confirmation bias* which can be described as following: "seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand" (Nickerson (1998:175; cited in Holter, 2018, p.77). In a sphere where many people share the same values and beliefs, it can create some kind of belonging and solidarity. In this way, alternative media can be seen as a interpretative community because the senders get to validate and confirm their own beliefs and theories.

Nevertheless, a "group mentality" challenges the public debate because the senders form a closed and one-sided worldview where *their* truth is the only one that is valid. By shutting down opponents of the debate and solely refer to mainstream media as fake news, there is no room for exchanging opinions and having a constructive debate. Because the sender's comments are considered to be true, the opponents are automatically labeled as liars. The same applies to the use of information sources The senders use alternative media to construct an alternative discourse. At the same time, they accuse mainstream media and journalists for being fake news, corrupt, and for spreading propaganda. In this way, they distance themselves from the majority society and reinforce the idea of us and them.

This brings us further to the next part of the analysis where I am going to discuss the senders' idea of "enemies". In other words, the enemies can also be described as *recipients,* but as the counter-discourse itself centers around the idea of "us and them", I find the word "enemy" to be a more suitable word in this analysis. In short, the sender's image of the enemy is based on the analysis of the comments.

4.4   The enemies

As said before, the counter-discourse itself, is driven by a plot where the thematic core of the discourse is the concept of truth. In this truth, the narrative about central "enemies" is a recurring subject of talk. These "enemies" can be seen as the very core problem of all social problems, where they all pose a threat to society in their own way. When it comes to enemies, there are different groups in the society and state actors who make up the total image of the enemy. I have therefore chosen to divide the enemies into five different groups.

The first group of enemy that I am going to discuss is *Muslims*. According to the senders, Muslims are seen as the biggest threat to the Western civilization, and are often associated with terrorism, violence, and barbarity. The second group is *the fortune hunters* (lykkejegerne). This group of enemy mainly includes non-western immigrants (also including Muslim immigrants), refugees, migrants, or asylum seekers. These people are often labeled as fake, lazy, freeloaders, liars, and criminals. The third group of enemies is the *traitors*, in other words Norwegian politicians. The politicians are ones with power and influence on society,

and they are, according to the senders, *deliberately* destroying the society. For example, by working against people's interests, politicians are betraying their own people. The politicians are also the ones who construct the public discourse that is based on lies and propaganda. Still, politicians alone are not able to construct the public discourse. This brings us further to the fourth groups, the left-wing and corrupt *mainstream media.* According to the senders, the mainstream media is collaborating with politicians to twist facts, cover the *real* truth, and brainwash the population. This leads us to the last group, which I have decided to call *the leftists.* This group mainly consists of opponents of the debate, and socialists. Among other things, these people are mainly seen accomplices in the Islamization of the West and "social disintegration" because they support and vote for left-wing and corrupt politicians. In addition, they are often described as naïve and "less" intelligent.

Overall, the "enemies" are based on the sender's perception of «us versus them», which is basically based on a plot mixed by racism, prejudices, rhetoric, and conspiracy theories about who threatens the society and who hides and manipulates the truth. The first group of enemy I am going to discuss is Muslims. As a whole, Muslims are by far considered the biggest and "most dangerous" threat to Norway.

4.4.1 The senders' understanding of Muslims and Islam

Hate speech and discrimination against Muslims on social media is a phenomenon most people are already familiar with, and Muslims are, in many cases, seen as scapegoats for all the world's problems. In general, the senders show a very static understanding of Muslims, their culture, and Islam as religion. This static understanding is represented through a conspiratorial thinking where Muslims are evil and dangerous. The senders' counter-discourse demonstrates clear Islamophobic attitudes and beliefs. In general, islamophobia is based on prejudice and antipathy, and can be defined as a "systematized, generalizing and ideological form of prejudice and practices that support the fear of, hatred against and discrimination of Muslims based on an assumed or real connection to Islamic beliefs and practices" (Bangstad & Døving; cited in Bangstad, 2014, p.12).

The counter-discourse centers around ideas about Muslims being different than others. Unlike other people, Muslims have an "underdeveloped» demeanor. A common mindset is that Muslims are primitive, medieval, violent and unable to integrate (Holter, 2018, p. 53), and

that they follow a sick culture that is characterized by patriarchy, terror, and oppression of women. This notion of Muslims as medieval and primitive refers to what Bangstad calls "racial stereotyping". He points out how "any Islamophobic theory or practice at some level links a theory of "how Muslims are" and the notion of "what Islam essentially is" (Bangstad, 2014, p.9). In this Islamophobic worldview, the senders create an "assumed" idea of what Islam is and how Muslims are. This leads to demonization and criminalization of Muslims as a group, where they are being labeled as violent, dangerous, and "different" from everyone else.

> Muslims are bringing a medieval and fucked up view of humanity into 2019. Perhaps they would have been better received by Norwegians if they had put aside those same attitudes that just destroyed the country they are running from ... And not to mention, quit stabbing, terrorizing and raping people.. that usually helps. – *"Runar"*

In the senders' reality, the Norwegian society is on the verge of being destroyed because of the tremendous increase in violence, rape, and murder. Among others, Muslims are responsible for this development. Muslim immigrants are often depicted as criminals, rapists or freeloaders who are unwilling to participate in the society (Haanshuus & Jupskås, 2017, p.158). One example is the senders' claim that Muslims men stab and rape far more than the average male population. In an interesting comment found in table 3 (p.43) "Robert" states that: "Muslims rape far more than Norwegians. Not only when it comes to assault rapes, but in all categories». In another comment about Muslim men, "Gry's" statement reads as follows:

> Unfortunately, Muslims do not take NO for a no.. Intrusive men who believe that Norwegian women want to have sex with them…. If they get NO.. it affects their honor.. Here in Norway women are in charge of their own body and decide who they want to have sex with..

Both "Robert's" and "Gry's" comment are built on an over-generalized belief about Muslim men being primitive and sexually uncontrollable. Because of their patriarchal culture, Muslim men have no respect for women, especially Norwegian women who are "asking for it" wearing "provocative" clothing.

The sender's hostile attitude towards Muslim's barbaric behavior also circulates around the idea that Muslims in general are "less developed", and that their primitive behavior is due to lack of common decency and self-control. Here the senders often refer to examples such as assaults and stabbing, like this comment for example:

> We all know who are stabbing each other with knives.. they need to start taking responsibility for their own kids... TAKE THE KNIVES FROM THEM... Not the society's responsibility.. Muslims don't have respect for anyone but CHILD PROTECTION ..... – *"Trude"*

In this statement, "Trude" claims that it is "quite obvious" that Muslims are the ones who stab each other. Her use of words also indicates that using knives is widespread among Muslim children and adolescents, and that their parents are not taking any responsibility for their actions. By claiming that Muslims only have respect for child protection (Barnevernet), it builds upon the Islamophobic idea about Muslims being primitive with no respect for the Norwegian system or the Norwegian laws whatsoever. Some also claims that Muslims' way of thinking and acting is biological, that it is "just the way they are", and that there is "something about their genes". This is illustrated in the following comments:

> As long as the earth exists, Muslims will always make war. Unfortunately, it's innate behavior. It's pure evil – *«Jens"*

> But it's in their fucking genes. We already have enough shit in this country and we do not need any more of it – *"Hans"*

The senders' static understanding of Muslims and Muslim culture is also demonstrated through their attitude towards Muslim headwear. Many senders believe that there are no Muslim women who willingly wear headwear. There is also an "assumed" idea that Muslim headwear is only a tool utilized by Muslim men to oppress women. In the counter-discourse, Muslim headwear is often referred to as something that "symbolizes" a totalitarian and dangerous ideology. In such arguments, the senders often use emotional appeals such as gender equality and Muslim women's right to decide for themselves as a strategy. Here, the senders try to appeals to the recipient's compassion. In rhetoric study, this is called «emotional arguments" or "pathos". Nilsen describes the term as: "the emotional reasoning, the one who speaks, expresses, whether to arouse or" "reinforce the audience's emotional engagement, touch them" (Nilsen, 2014, p.53). Holter points out how pathos rhetoric acts as some kind of Janus face between empathy and phobia where the senders want to portray themselves as

advocates of liberal values (in this case, gender equality and women's rights), while on the other hand, they discriminate and label an entire social group, including their cultural practices and religious beliefs (Holter, 2018, p.54).

Overall, the senders generally show very little understanding of the fact that there are multiple ways to be Muslim. Unlike Christians for example, most Muslims think and act the same. Although it is important to point out that the sender's level of prejudices against Muslims may vary, there is no doubt that the "red thread" in the sender's alternative discourse is the belief that Muslims are potentially dangerous. The distinction between culture and religion is rarely recognized, and Muslim faith is often referred to as extreme Islamism. This brings us further to the sender' perception of Islam.

4.4.2 Islam: A dangerous and totalitarian ideology

Another common feature in the senders' counter-discourse is that Islam is the very evil in this world. Here, Islam is redefined from being a religion to a dangerous and totalitarian ideology. While «Ellen» sees Islam as a «sick ideology», «Roger» describes Islam as a violent ideology that is against the way *we* live. In the counter-discourse, Islam is redefined from being a religion to a dangerous and totalitarian ideology. Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena (NDLA) describes term "ideology» as follows:

> [...] a mindset based on principles with clear goals for social organization. The principals are put in a systematic context and has a program for how these goals can be realized. Thus, an ideology is a set of goals and a collection of means to achieve these specific goals. Political ideas and ideologies are based on ideas about how the society should be organized and how we distribute power, benefits and burdens (Auen, 2019).

Holter points out how Islam and *Islamism* are often portrayed as mutual categories where the distinction between moderate and extreme Muslims is almost invisible. Among other things, many senders believe that *moderate* Muslims do not exist, which is an important characteristic of the Islamophobic world view of the senders apply in the counter-discourse (Jupskås 2012:102-105; cited in Holter, 2018, p.55).

> Islam is not a religion after all. It is an extremely dogmatic, oppressive and totalitarian anti-human ideology ... – *"Henning"* (Table 3, p.41)

By using the word "ideology", "Henning's" delegitimization of Islam as a religion is being reinforced. The distinction between religious and peaceful Islam and extreme and violent Islamism becomes invisible, and an image that all Muslims are inherently evil is being formed. Here, associations are often drawn to IS, and that all Muslims are supporters of what IS represents.

This brings us further to one of the topics that has been heavily discussed in the public debate this year, which is the sender's attitude against "IS-women" and "IS-children". IS-women and IS-children has been a debated topic in Norwegian media, where normative question related to Norway's duty to take home Norwegian IS-women and their children who want children has been the main focus. Not surprisingly, the topic itself has caused heated debates where Hate speech comments have flooded the comment sections. These debates have been almost absent for factual discussion, but rather provoked hatred and irrational comments. Here words like "pathetic creeps (krapyl)", "traitors" and "scum" are words that are often repeated. Some comments also go so far as to encourage murder by claiming that these women "should be executed". In an interesting comment in table 3 (see p.41), "Vetle" has the following to say about this issue:

> Just get her hanged as fast as possible. She shall be executed, not be sent to Norway. Her children are not our responsibility. If you have had any connection with IS, you should be killed, regardless of citizenship. Islamists are worthless cockroaches who have renounced their right to exist on planet Earth. If any of these pigs manage, against all odds, to get back to our territory, I hope there are patriotic Norwegians out there to make the process short. Doubt that the police even bother to investigate! It's called cleansing and garbage disposal! Let's annihilate these pigs!

In this comment, "Vetle" encourages the killing of other people, and uses the argument that "they deserve it". He also points out that patriotic Norwegians should take the law into their own hands and exterminate these people. "Vetle" uses words such as «cleansing» and «garbage disposal» to describe the killing process. He further uses degrading and dehumanizing words like «rats», "scum", and «biological garbage" to describe them. Nevertheless, what I find most noteworthy is the majority of grown-up people's lack of empathy towards the innocent children. The fact that these children have done nothing wrong

and that they, legally speaking, *are* Norwegian, does not seem to arouse any kind of empathy at all. Among other things, many senders use argumentations such as: "these children have never been Norwegian in the first place," and "Norway has no obligation whatsoever to these terrorist-children". In an interesting comment, one of the senders point out how "these children, even infants, are brainwashing from A to Å" and that "it is in their fucking genes". Others claim that these children can never change because it is already in their blood and that they are going to end up as criminal NAV-clients (NAVere) anyway.

Through hate rhetoric, the senders want to arouse anger and fear, and a notion about Muslims being violent and evil. Nilsen describes hate rhetoric as "derogatory language, which can arouse or reinforce negative feelings, attitudes or perceptions towards a group, which convey negative attitudes and perceptions towards the target group and its members" (Nilsen, 2014, p. 35). This kind of rhetoric is a central part of how the senders formulate their language, and huge part of the counter-discourse. Even though Muslims mainly are perceived as main villains, such rhetoric is also targeted at several groups in the society. This brings us further to the next group of enemy, the criminal fortune hunters.

4.4.3 The criminal fortune hunters

I online debates, the terms "immigrant", "migrant", and "refugee" are often used interchangeably, and what these groups have in common is that they considerably are being perceived as criminal, false, dishonest, and ungrateful. Many senders often use words and expressions that criminalize and label these people as a whole. One example is how they often are being portrayed as criminal fortune hunters in search of free welfare. Holter describes how the idea of migrants and refugees often is rationed through narratives and analogues where they are presented as bad people (Holter, 2018). Here, the dominating truth is about how these so-called "refugees" are only here because of our money, and that they just get everything for free from the state without having to integrate or contribute to the society. Words such as «enrichment» (berikelsen), «freeloaders» and "NAVere" are often used in a very negative sense. In short, NAV refers to "The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration" *(*Arbeids-og velferdsforvaltningen), and is a public Norwegian welfare agency that administers benefits and services (nav.no). In table 3 (p.41), an interesting statement by «Turid» goes like this:

> Everyone who comes from the third world is overjoyed to be here. Here, money is transferred into their account every month, and they have to do nothing but produce more children, and their account gets bigger for each child. To them, Norway is a gold mine. They send their children to free kindergarten and just relax and enjoy life and their hobbies. They beg for more free stuff for their children and they receive it. Not many people get everything they demand without magic tricks

The counter-discourse circulates around the senders' perception that non-western immigrants, migrants, and refugees are treated *differently* and *better* than natives. Unlike *real* (ethnic) Norwegians who work and struggle for their money, fortune hunters get free money and benefits from the state, demand prerogatives, and refuse to integrate. This suspicious attitude towards immigrants and refugees as freeloaders, fake, and lazy is a dominating mindset in the conspiracy theory about the "fortune hunters". In this theory, a distinct conflict between "natives" and "foreigners" is created, where the senders feel that they are somehow "losing control" of their society by being downgraded by their own politicians. When the sender talk about immigrants and refugees who get everything for free, it witnesses to underlying feelings such as bitterness, jealousy and suspicion. Here, the emphasis is weighted on how "elected politicians" treat ethic Norwegians, and that Norwegians are being discriminated in their own countries.

The senders also make clear dividing lines between "real" and "fake" refugees, where many of those who come to Norway are placed in the second group. Holter suggests how many senders use analogies and examples to legitimize their criminalization of refugees. On the one hand, there are "real refugees" who work and struggle, while so-called "boat people" (refugees fleeing by boat) who get everything for free, are demanding and ungrateful, are considered "false" (Holter, 2018, p.38). The following comment demonstrates this mindset:

> To all import-loving people, remember there is a difference between foreigners who come to Norway in the usual way, with their ID papers.. These are tourists/visiting/going to work/or moving to the country. On the other hand, there are those you guys like to import: Gucci-refugees with their smartphones and designer clothes (who tend to forget or lose their ID, or they arrive with newly purchased ID). These people can be found on NAV if they haven't already "disappeared" from the public/gone to prison where they are planning new crimes .... Some differences huh??
> – *"Pelle"*

Such dividing lines also apply to immigrants the sender's often refer to «good» and «bad» immigrants. On the one hand, there are immigrants from European or Asian countries such as

Thailand, the Philippines or China who work, integrate and adapt to the "Norwegian" way of living. On the other hand, there are "non-integrable people" (people from the Middle East, certain African countries, and "dysfunctional" Muslim countries) who come here without any intention to integrate, demand free money and special rights, and commit crimes. The senders often use words like "criminals", «faenskap» (no English word for it), and «trash» to describe these people. In addition, the term «enrichment» (berikelsen) is also being often used in a negative or ironic sense.

> Enrichment !? Seeing the words «immigrant" and "enrichment" in the same sentence makes me sick to my stomach! No one can say that all the immigration to Europe over the past few years is an enrichment for the countries that are stuck with shit! Just look at the tremendous increase in knife crime, especially in Oslo. Car fires, rape, robbery, violence, all kinds of crime. So no, this is not an enrichment. – *"Olav"*
> (see table 3, p.54)

"Olav" thinks it is disgusting to associate the word "immigrant" with "enrichment", and use degrading and dehumanizing words such as "shit" to describe immigrants as a group. He also refers to European countries and how badly immigration has worked during recent years, and brings in Oslo as an example of the tremendous increase in knife use, car fires, rape, robbery, and violence. In the comment above, "Olav" highlights the senders' narrative about immigrants being responsible for all crime in Western countries. Such attitudes thus reinforce the stigmatization and demonization of an entire groups, which helps to promote racism.

Something that also stood out in the analysis was how the senders managed to turn their own stigma and discrimination of minority groups into some kind of "reverse racism". In such context, the senders used arguments that would portray ethnic Norwegians as the *real* victims. Here, the senders often refer to narratives about immigrants who come to Norway and hate white people, our culture and our way of living, Muslim men who terrorize and rape our women, and refugees who are only here because of our money and wealth. A comment on this reads as follows:

> Dark-skinned people are behind the worst type of racism. They come to Norway and hate white people. But of course that is both legal and political correct, so they get to do whatever they want – *"Espen"*

Through such conspiracy theory about "reverse racism and discrimination", the senders justify their negative comments by claiming that *they* (foreigners) are the ones with prejudices and negative attitudes against *Norwegians.* In their reality perception, ethnic Norwegians are the ones who are victims of hatred, discrimination and racism. Another sender also commented:

> If Norwegians say anything negative about immigrants, then we go to prison for for racism and god knows what. But if an immigrant attacks us in the most brutal way, both physically and verbally, then it becomes neglected and it's not that big of a deal. Norwegians are the most spineless fucking people I've ever heard of. It's embarrassing! – *«Oddvar»*

Holter explains how this can be used as some kind of rhetorical strategy where the senders organizes the story in such a way that the audience feels empathy for them. Here, the senders are playing the "victim card" to rationalize and legitimize extreme attitudes, but also to avoid a social "stigma" by being placed in a racist category (Holter, 2018, p.64).

The next group of enemy that I will discuss is politicians who are both ethically and legally responsible for the "madness" (Muslim invasion and hordes of refugees and non-western immigrants) Norwegian are exposed to. Among other things, politicians deliberately destroy the Norwegian society and fail their own people. It is also they who manipulate the truth, and gag the freedom of speech of those who tell the *truth.*

4.4.4 The traitors: The naïve politicians

A common feature in the sender's discourse is their strong contempt and mistrust in politicians and the Norwegian democracy. This mistrust is demonstrated through conspiracy theories where politicians are described as "the very core" of the *main* problems, namely Muslims taking over Europe, and the "uncontrolled" stream of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As mentioned in previous section, the belief that Norwegian politicians betray their people is a discursive feature in the senders' hate speech comments, and the word "traitor" is is something that is often used to describe Norwegian politicians and their strategies.

The very essence of the senders' conspiracy theory is that politicians are corrupt state actors who work *against* people's interests. First and foremost, politicians deliberately facilitate and work for Islamization of Norway. Here the term "sneak Islamization" (snikislamisering)

comes into the picture, which has become a controversial term in the public debate. It was back in 2009, when the leader of The Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), Siv Jensen used the term during her speech during a debate concerning the use of Hijab, and whether or not Oslo should have its own Muslim school ("- Snik-islamisering," 2009). In short, the term can be explained as the process in which the Islamization of the society happens in a "sneaky" way. In recent years, the term has been often used by right-wing extremists, anti-Islamic groups like SIAN, and in political debates by right-wing politicians.

According to Nilsen (2014) "The term "sneak Islamization" is a form of descriptive extremism that has no connection with reality and reason, but rather suitable to turn negative emotions to its audience into play (Nilsen, 2014, p.142). Because of the term is mainly associated with hate speech, and is also a heavily used in online debates in discussion regarding Muslims and Islam. In this context, the arguments often circulate around the senders' theory that politicians have a hidden goal to Islamize the Norwegian society and promote the power of Muslims through a "gradual and sneaky" process. Among other things, This is done by supporting mosques and minority communities, including halal meat in school canteens, removing Christian symbols and practices, or accepting the use of hijab in public workplaces. One of the senders is commenting:

> There is, and will be "sneak Islamization", just wait and see in a few years. It's going to be like hell all over Europe. Only naive politicians who are in denial. – *"Åge"*

The Islamization process is often described as a "hidden agenda" that involves a *quiet* and *strategic* seizure of power from our politicians. Overall, the politicians are responsible for destroying the society by "supporting" Islamic religious communities, by taking in unlimited numbers of non-western immigrants and refugees, and by failing their own people. In an interesting comment, "Preben" has the following message:

> Well It's okay for politicians to say no to begging. They should think about themselves as social parasites (samfunnsnytere). Sit and scratch their balls while they figure out new fees and commit treason and other crimes. Their immigration policy is treason. These so-called refugees are allowed to run havoc unpunished. They are allowed to commit rape unpunished. There are already areas where the police dare not enter. They get social benefits and economic support for free. If us natives ask for the

same, the suddenly there are budget issues. One day they are going to take over this country. BECAUSE OF THE TRAITORS AT THE PARLIAMENT.

In this comment (see table 3, p.42) "Preben" claims that the Norwegian immigrant policy is treason. He also claims that the so-called "enrichment" do not have to live by the same rules and laws as Norwegians. Unlike "us", they can rape and wreak havoc as much as they want without being punished. At the same time, politicians are giving them benefits and economic support while *real* (ethnic) Norwegians have to suffer because of "shortage on money". In such conspiratorial mindset, the senders emphasizes how politicians "favor" certain minority groups while they discriminate and deprioritize their own people. One of the senders wrote the following post:

> Immigrants get houses and apartments, they don't pay rent and electricity, their deposit is covered, child benefit, free kindergarten, how can this be called poverty?? They send their kids to Quran school, and who have to pay?? Something is not right. And what have they done with all of their money? They send all of their money out of the country and who receives it? Norwegians have to pay for everything themselves. Immigrants get everything for free from both NAV and the government. The socialist Left Party is talking bullshit and the Liberal Party even worse! See consequences. Simply incompetent - *"Tove"*

Here, the victim role comes in to the picture again. According to "Tove", immigrants get everything they point at while Norwegians have to pay for everything for themselves. In this a reality, Norwegians are portrayed as social losers and victims in their own country, while "those who are not even Norwegian" receive special treatment. Such arguments build upon the notion about politicians failing their own people

This brings us to the senders' notion of politicians being cowards, weak, and naïve. Instead of being considerate of what *the people* want, politicians put political correctness above their common sense rather than "waking up" and realize the *real* truth. Among other things, politicians do not take the consequences of Islamization and "open borders" seriously. An example is how they, instead of prioritizing the safety of Norwegians, choose to give migrants and refugees "free entrance" to Norway because they *feel sorry for them.* Their naivety is causing «Swedish conditions» (Svenske tilstander), where ethnic Norwegians become victims of rape and murder. The term "Swedish conditions" is often used synonymous with immigration, and has become some kind of symbol concept (symbolbegrep) of a "failed" immigration policy.

The term is often associated with negative consequences of immigration- and refugee policy such as crime, unemployment, parallel society, "ghettoization" (ghettofisering), and youth gangs (Johansson, 2018, p.20-11). Because Norwegian politicians are considered coward and naïve, the Norwegian society is about to be destroyed. This is often described by the term "snillisme". Although being a rather diffuse term, it is often used in the context of how stupid and naive politicians are. They think they are doing something good through so-called "snillisme" but they are unable to realize that they are destroying the lives of ethnic Norwegians (Holter, 2018, p.45). One of the comments reads as follows:

> Maybe we who owns Norway (the people) can get to decide our own future? Politicians are standing on the Norwegian border randomly handing out citizenships... misinterpreted "snillisme"!! Even if we help foreigners, it doesn't mean that they shall become Norwegians and use all of our resources . Where do we go in 20 years, when these maniacs have destroyed Norway?? – *"Tor Arne"*

In addition to being stupid and naïve, the senders also see Norwegian politicians as liars who do not keep their promises, and therefore cannot be trusted. Politicians do not really care about their own people, they only care about power and their own position. By keeping this position, they are making the same promises over and over, but they never keep them. They only say what they believe will give them the most votes, but they do not really care about keeping their promises.

Even though the politicians appear to be the worst traitors, they are unable to construct the public discourse alone. In order to spread their lies and propaganda, they depend on Norwegian media outlets, which leads us to the next group of enemy: the corrupt mainstream media.

4.4.5 The left-wing biased and corrupt media

Mainstream media is largely seen as the politicians "helping hand" and "propaganda platform". The senders are generally strong opponents of the established media outlets, and understand the media practice as a result of a strategic cooperation between politicians and the established media. Their common goal is to influence the Norwegian people with lies and left-wing propaganda. Thus, the journalists allow the political agenda to take precedence over true facts and information, they are portrayed as corrupt (Holter, 2018, p.49).

Overall, the senders are generally strongly faithful to their belief that mainstream media represents the news from a left-wing and fabricated point of view, and they are strongly convinced that politicians and the media are working together to construct a false public discourse. Because the senders tend to be extremely in favor of their own beliefs, their perception of mainstream media is that the media discourse does not comply their own convictions. Because they regard the counter-discourse as the *only* and *absolute* truth, they totally reject *anything* that does not comply with their beliefs (bipolar presentation of the world) (Erjavic & Kovačič, 2012, p.905-906). In such way, they claim that mainstream media (along with politicians) are the ones who are spreading lies and propaganda, while they label themselves as "those who tell the truth".

One example is when Dagbladet earlier this year posted an article about Norwegians' attitudes towards immigrants. In this article, Statisk Sentralbyrå (SSB), an academic independent institution responsible for collecting, producing and publishing official general statistics (https://www.ssb.no/omssb/om-oss) conducted a survey which showed that 7 out of 10 Norwegians are positive towards immigrants. Not surprisingly, this article was not well received by many of the debaters, and both Dagbladet and SSB were accused of manipulating the answers, of having only conducted the survey among immigrants, and then spreading leftist propaganda in public. I have selected some of the most interesting comments that emphasize the sender's conspiracy theory about Norwegian media:

> I refuse to believe that 7 out of 10 are positive to stabbing, car fires and other negative things! Luckily, not that many have died from all the stabbing! Not ONE day goes by without us hearing about it. This is not normal in our country. Our new citizens (våre nye landsmenn) are the ONLY ones who are doing such horrible things! –*"Karianne"* Thickheaded (Nedsnødde) DB (Dagbladet)!!!! When I ask Norwegians about this, 9 out of 10 say that Islam is about to destroy the West ! I don't put words in their mouths like DB !! DB will soon piss their pants together with the rest of MSM (mainstream media) when you see all the bullshit you have created ! You are a bunch of fucking TRAITORS !!!!!! SSB and DB both represent the same crap, DB is doing just like the lying media all around Europe, rolling out the red carpet and protecting the world's most dangerous ideology ! The majority is sleeping and will not understand the consequences before it's too late! – *"Thomas"* (see table 3, p.43)

The comments above illustrate a conspiratorial mindset about the news image. Here, the phrase "discrimination against Norwegians" comes back into the picture. Many senders share

the perception that mainstream media do everything they can to "protect" minority groups, and that they refrain from writing anything that would put them in a bad light. This is practiced through a biased news dissemination where crimes committed against *immigrants* becomes national news, while crime committed against *white Norwegians* is ignored my media. This c conspiratorial mindset promotes the idea that mainstream media is discriminating ethnic Norwegians, by portraying Norwegians as criminal and racist, whereas in reality it is Muslims and immigrants who are the real villains. Holter point out how the senders believe that the mass media is a "political tool used to gather support on topics that portray the left side as "good" and the right side as "evil." (Holter, 2018, p.49). this is often interpreted as a kind of hate rhetoric against the "right side", and can be understood as some kind of master suppression technique media use to hold them down.

Another example of propaganda is media's coverage of the climate crisis and global warming. One of the senders' conspiracy theory is that global warming is a hoax, and many share a strong belief that the global warming is invented and distorted by globalists, fake scientists, and the political elite to make profit out of it. Along with mainstream media, they have mixed together a "socialist complot" as a tactic to spread fear, stifle the capitalism, and destroy people's everyday life. Many senders use words like "climate hysteria", "fraud" and "propaganda" to describe the phenomenon.

Lastly, the senders also points out how mainstream media also makes people dumber, and that the majority of the population are brainwashed and fed with lies. This brings us to the final group of enemy: the socialists, also called "leftists".

4.4.6 The "leftists"

Even though the politicians and the media are seen as the biggest traitors, there are also "civilians" are as "dangerous" as the liberal elite. In this claim, the senders mainly refers to Socialists and people who support "the wrong" politics, that is, opponents of the debate and socialists. According to the senders, these people have zero insight or reality orientation, and are heavily "brainwashed" by left-wing propaganda from beginning to end. Socialists are also considered guilty of "what is happening in our society". This is because they support a socialist mindset and vote for the same incompetent and treacherous politicians who work for

Islamic impeachment, and betray their own people over and over. Based on this, this group of enemy is often referred to as «leftists» (venstrevridde) and «left-wing radicals". Leftists are often described as less intelligent, naive, and ignorant. Here, the senders often refer to Norwegians who are «sleeping» and refuse to "wake up". Overall, leftists are not capable of, or enlightened enough to realize the real truth, and are often referred to as "brainwashed", "stupid", and "traitors". In an interesting comment, "Bjørn" states as follows:

> The leftists can't get enough of murder and rape, not to mention new welfare clients and abusers of the disability pension in Norway. They must be driven by intense hatred of themselves, their own children, and their neighbors. Thought they would learn from seeing what is happening in Sweden and France now, but no.. (see table 3, p.43)

With this, "Bjørn" follows a theory that the leftists *want* the society to be destroyed, and that they have a goal for Norway to be invaded by freeloaders and criminal immigrants. On the other hand, "Karl" believes that it has more to do with "human development", and how the modern society has affected "white" people's ability to think rationally.

> To put it mildly, today's whites are naive, ignorant and self-destructive, and have a direct harmful fanaticism towards statism, science, decadence and Satanism; as a consequence of zero alertness and/or bonding with things such as religion, spirituality, nature, the universe or something higher .. Deadlocked and mentally blown, trapped in a lump of meat without having any understanding of the outside world or its divine, limitless potential ...

In sum, interpretations tell us that the senders are likely to portray themselves as smarter and more enlightened than people "on the left side" It is created some kind of illusion that *they* (the senders) and likeminded people are the only ones who are able to see through the lies of politicians and mainstream media, and the "ability" to see the *real* truth. Such attitude is causing the senders to distance themselves from society, and to reinforce the truth about they being right and everyone who does not share their views and opinions is wrong.

4.5 Findings and analysis: Summary

Overall, the research itself has been an attempt to gain more knowledge about hate speech senders, and examine the language of hate speech from a discursive perspective. The research was conducted as a two-part analysis, where both content analysis and discourse analysis were been used as methodical approach. Through content analysis, I have focused on mapping the scope of hate speech, in addition to gather a general statistics and essential demographic factors about the senders.

Among other things, the analysis showed that hate speech comments were notably tied to middle-aged and older white men. Even though women in general were just as active in discussions, the majority of hate speech senders consists of middle-aged men with the average age of 56. Although the unknown age group makes up 20 percent of the senders, the data still shows us that middle-aged men make up the majority of the senders. The analysis also showed that approximately 6,6 percent of the uncensored comments in TV2, Nettavisen, and Dagbladet's comment sections meet the selection criteria for hate speech. Most of the comments are targeted against people with minority background (ethnicity, race, religious beliefs, cultural practices etc.), people with other political views, politicians, and mainstream media and journalists.

In general, hate speech comments were also mainly targeted at groups instead of individuals. Exceptions were under circumstances where politicians or public figures have said or done something publicly that the senders do not like. In such cases, the comments often contain personal attacks, accusations, and comments based on appearance. When it comes to hate speech targeted at groups, most of the comments are targeted at non-western immigrants, people of different ethnic background, or people with different cultural practices or religious beliefs. Here, Muslims were regarded as the main villains, and Islam was perceived as a political political ideology rather than a religion. The other proportion of hate speech comments were often targeted against leftists (socialists and opponents of the debate). Her

When it comes to discourse analysis, the goal was to analyze the linguistic content of the senders' comment in order to get a better understanding about its message and meaning.

The discourse analysis has put emphasis on the senders' reality perception, and how the senders through alternative knowledge construct a counter-discourse against the public discourse. Here I have, among other things, discussed the senders' criminalization and dehumanization of certain groups, rhetoric and conspiracy theories, their understanding political governance and media's role, and how they use the counter-discourse to create a us versus them-attitude. Overall, The counter-discourse itself represents the sender's reality perception and understanding of the people and the society. The senders reality perception circles around the idea that the public discourse is based on lies and propaganda. Here the plot itself is organized around who the enemies are, who construct and manipulate the public discourse, what consequences it has for the society, and who sits on the *real* truth.

Among other things, the discourse analysis shows that Muslim immigrants are perceived as the main villains who not belong in any western society. Muslims are often perceived as evil, violent, un-civilized, and mentally incapable of integrating in the Norwegian society. They also have a hidden agenda to take over Europe and Norway, and annihilate all of its people. Here, Islam is also understood as politics and not religion, and they share the perception that Islam is threatening our country and culture. On the other hand, there are migrants and so-called "refugees", who are perceived as criminal fortune hunters looking for free welfare. These people are described as criminal, dishonest and ungrateful. On one hand, they demand free money and benefits from the state, while at the same time, they refuse to work and integrate, and commit crimes against ethnic Norwegians.

This destruction of society is caused by politicians because of their naïve and uncritical attitude to the huge influx of immigrants and refugees, and their cunning plan to Islamize the society. It is also the same people who manipulate and hides the real truth. Together with mainstream media, they deceive the people by spreading lies and propaganda. In this way, they also construct the hegemonic and public discourse, the *false* truth. Overall, the senders' discursive knowledge and interactions becomes some kind of collective motivation to work against the public discourse.

In sum, the analysis itself has provided insight in the scope of hat speech comments in news comment sections on Facebook, who the majority of who the senders are, how the think, and how they develop a counter-discourse that is completely in opposite of the majority's

hegemonic and dominating ideology. This takes us further to the next and final chapter, the discussion chapter. In this chapter, I will sum up findings and analysis and discuss the these findings tied to the research question.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research paper has taken its starting point in hate speech comments in news below-the-line comment sections on Facebook. Based on Hate speech comments on Facebook, the main goal has been to answer the following research question: *"What are the discursive characteristics of hate speech comments in news comment sections online?"*. In sum, the discourse analysis has served as a tool to investigate the relationship with senders' reality perception and language. Before I start discussing findings analysis tied to the research question, I will first sum up findings from the secondary research method.

In this summary, I have taken previous research findings into consideration and compared them with my own findings. First of all, the analysis showed that hate speech comments were notably tied to middle-aged to older white men. Even though the Facebook debates consisted of just as many women, the majority of hate speech senders still consisted of men with an age spread between 40 and 60. Several research show similar findings (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016; Holter, 2018; LDO, 2018;), Where Nadim & Fladmoe also pointed out that men in general express higher tolerance for hate speech and sexual harassment (Ask et al., 2016; Hagen 2015; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2016). My research findings also indicated that the majority of the comments were written by Norwegians. I still have to point out that this is mostly based on assumptions and general calculations, even though evidence indicates that this gives a realistic image of hate speech senders.

Most of the comments were targeted against ethnicity, religion, culture, political views, politicians, and mainstream media (journalists and media in general). Overall, I found that most comments were targeted at groups and not individuals. These findings have similarities to other studies. Among others, Erjavic and Koviačič found that hate speech comments dominated under news about domestic and foreign politics and criminal, national, sexual, and racial conflicts (Erjavic and Koviačič, 2012, p.907). Here the main difference was that I did not register any hate speech comments targeted against homosexuals. Even though this might have been accidental, I still believe that hate speech targeted at sexuality has decreased in Norway.

On the other hand, several studies have found that hate speech comments are, to a great extent, targeted at minority groups like Muslims, immigrants, and refugees, where Muslims are considered to be the greatest "enemies" of them all. Among other things, Muslims are often being described as violent and evil with dangerous intentions (Awan, 2016; Vasaasen, 2017; Holter, 2018). Similarly, my findings showed that hate speech comments were mainly targeted against minority groups: Muslims, non-Western immigrants, and refugees. Muslims were regarded as the main villains, while refugees were depicted as freeloaders, lazy, and criminal. The other proportion of hate speech comments were often targeted against politicians, mainstream media, and leftists (socialists and opponents of the debate). Here, such comments were targeted at them being corrupt, traitors, and cowards.

Examining statistical and demographic features of the senders has been relevant in order to be able to map the scope of hate speech comments on Facebook, and to give the senders a "face". Furthermore, I will discuss findings and analysis related to discourse analysis, and how these findings answer the research question.

5.1.1 How the language reflects the sender's perception of reality

Language has a close connection with thought, and Nilsen point out how "people think with the words they have available and the worldview associated with those words" (Nilsen, 2014, p.103). An example is the senders use of an hate-rhetorical discourse that is based on negative beliefs and attitudes against Muslims, where its function and goal is to disparage a group of people, and to weaken their social status and reputation. Through language, the senders are labeling a whole group as violent, primitive, and dangerous, where they are using dehumanizing words such as "scum", "shit", and "rats" to describe them. The language, within a group of people, can also reinforce an already existing reality perception, and when the use of insulting and degrading words spreads, it can create some kind of understanding that some groups are less worth. In other words, the use of words can help to disparage an entire group (ibid, p.19-20)

Through language, the senders create their own "reality", a reality that forms the counter-hegemonic discourse. As language and discourse is strongly connected, there are several characteristics of the senders' hateful language. The language can also reinforce an already

existing reality perception by people using a certain type of words about other groups. Among other things, the the analysis shows that the senders use extremely negative words when describing particular groups in the society. In short, the language itself helps shape the senders' understanding of society as a whole, and it is through language that the senders construct the overall counter-discourse.

Part of the features of the counter-discourse itself is how senders perceive their own identity in the majority community. Overall, the counter discourse show that the senders see themselves as "those who have the real truth", but that they share the perception of being oppressed and discriminated by the liberal elite. Among other things, they believe that they are being deprioritized by politicians because in their reality, immigrants and refugees are getting everything they want for free. The counter-discourse shows signs of underlying emotions such as inferiority, jealousy, and the feeling of not being taken seriously.

The analysis also shows that many senders share the experience that *their* truth is being suppressed. Vasaasen points out how the senders turn this experience into some kind of "battle of resistane". Instead of conforming to the public discourse of the majority society, the senders are more favorably jointly understood as honorable warriors about the "truth" against Islam and the discourses of the majority society, they instead compare themselves with "warriors" who fight for the truth (Vasaasen, 2017, p.66) In this way, they distance themselves from the society and reinforce the conspiratorial mentality of "us and them". This takes us further to how the senders use the counter-discourse as a strategy to "enlighten" others.

5.1.2 Discourse as a enlightenment strategy

The sendes' counter discourse is rooted through rhetorics and conspiratoritorial and discursive knowledge about the society as a whole, which includes knowledge about minority groups like Muslims and refugees, political governance, and the media. The discourse put strong emphasis on "right and wrong", who the enemies are, and the consequences of the future, and unlike the majority population, the senders are seen to have a completely different perception of reality and the society than the majority of the population.

Overall, the analysis has shown that very few senders see their comments as either hateful or racist, but rather as an enlightenment, and a "lesson" about the truth. For example, many

claim that their critical view on Muslims are eligible because of the "the way" Muslims behave and act. At the same time, the senders feel that politicians and the media are manipulates the truth about Muslims. In this way, the sender's hate speech comments can be seen as an attempt to delegitimize the hegemonic ideology, and enlighten people about the *real* truth the liberal elite does not tell us. Erjavec and Kovačič have earlier mentioned how hate speech senders tend to take on the role as watchdogs. In this role, the senders see themselves as responsible to spreading the truth and enlighten people about the dangers that threaten the society (Erjavec and Kovačič, 2012, p.912). Because the media deliberately fails to inform people about the truth, many senders believe it is their responsibility to enlighten people (Holter, 2018, p.91). which brings us further to the senders perception of war, and how the counter-discourse is used in a war-rhetorical perspective.

The senders' reality perception puts Norway and Europe in some kind of war, where "evil forces" are planning to take over. The senders' perception of the society bears the mark of a dystopian future perspective (Holter, 2018). Several senders used words and phrases such as "war", "civil war", "build a wall", and "defend ourselves", while they refer to the "inevitable catastrophic development" that is about to happen. In such war rhetoric, the senders use hate speech and war rhetoric to establish and strengthen the roles between "enemies" and "allies".

A distinct feature of the counter-discourse is how the senders generally share the same conspiratorial worldview. In this reality, Norwegian culture is about to die out and be replaced by foreigners from non-western countries, and the liberal elite (politicians, the media) are internal accomplices. The senders use hate speech to dehumanize those who are considered enemies, which also allows them look at enemies with contempt (Nilsen, 2014). The counter-discourse is also strongly characterized by fear and almost paranoid worldview that tells us that we live in a dangerous world where enemies will destroy us.

5.1.3 Democracy and truth: A discursive conflict

One of the foundations of the counter-discourse is the senders solid perception of truth. In their eyes, *they* are the ones with the real truth. This is the absolute truth, and also the objective truth. Here, the senders perceptions circulate around negative and dehumanizing attitudes against Muslims and Islam, non-Western immigrants and refugees. In addition,

politicians are accused of Islamizing Norway, "facilitating" crime, and betraying their own people. They also secretly "collaborate" with mainstream media to twist the truth and spread lies and leftist propaganda.

Still, I consider the sender's idea of freedom of speech to be very contradictory. The counter-discourse shows that the senders are strong supporters of free speech, and many share the feeling of being silenced. On the other hand, senders want to "restrict" human rights to certain social groups. One examples of this is how they actively are " fighting" to ban Islam, ban mosques, and refuse Muslim women to wear hijab. In Norway, the right to freedom of religion goes under the Norwegian Constitution §16, where freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for a free and democratic society. Although religious freedom does not go directly under the Freedom of Expression Act (§100), according to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, it is still a human right and some of the constitution in Norway. Banning a religion or depriving religious and cultural practices also contributes to restricting basic human rights. On the other hand, senders are generally strong supporters of free speech and the freedom to use whatever words they want about whomever they want. Overall, their perception of free speech and human rights does not make sense.

After having discussed previous findings tied to the research question, I believe it is also necessary to briefly discuss the consequences of online hate speech. Similar to bullying, threats and violence, hate speech can also have serious consequences for recepients, and I believe that consequences of online hate speech is something that needs to be talked.

5.1.4 Consequences of online hate speech

Hate speech can be experienced as an attack on one's dignity, which can also have prolonged psychological consequences for the victim. Still, the boundary between what hate speech really is and what is acceptable, is an eternal debate. There are arguments on both sides, and Many believe that hate speech in the public debate should not, or to very little extent, be regulated because of the strong foundation of free speech (Warburton, 2009, p.1). This goes back to the political philosophy of John Stuart Mill *On Liberty*. According to Mill, hate speech shall only be illegal when it becomes an incitement to violence or libel (ibid, p.57), and uses the term "public cleansing function" as a defense argument. He also describes "the

public" as a "market for ideas" and brings in the argumentation that censorship of certain expressions or opinions will cause the truth not to come forth (Midtbøen et al., 2017, p.13). Mill's idea of truth emphasizes the idea that censorship means taking away the voice of an individual or a group.

On the other hand, arguments also emphasize on the idea that no to little regulation might have a de-democratizing effect on the society because people who fear or have experienced hate speech might be afraid to speak their mind (Midtbøen et al., 2017). Here, the term "silencing mechanism" is used. From this point of view, hate speech and degrading comments, may in fact have a negative effect on the democracy. Barbara Perry and Shahid, who refer to empirical studies from Canada, claim that being systematically targeted with hate speech or unpleasant or derogatory comments, can contribute to consequences such as fear, self-contempt, and the feeling of being inferior (Perry & Alvi, 2012, p.65). As hate speech works to «guard and reinforce boundaries and hierarchies between groups, and to remind those who are considered "different" or "other" of where they belong" (Perry, 2001; Midtbøen et al., 2017, p.53), it can be used as a silence mechanism. All in all, this creates a democratic problem when it comes to free speech, because it means that come people's voices are being taken away.

This is a particular problem among minority groups. In *Status for ytringsfriheten*, research showed that negative experiences with hateful comments would silence minority groups to a greater extent than "ethnic" Norwegians. Among the majority population, approximately one in five stated that experience with unpleasant or degrading comments made them more cautious, while more than a third of the minorities gave the same response. Thus, people with minority background not necessarily experience any more negative comments than the majority population, they had the experience that the comments would be based on unfair terms like religion and ethnic background (Staksrud et al., 2014, p.44).

5.1.5 Free speech and utterance responsibility

The discussion concerning hate speech puts a question mark around the term "freedom of speech". A living and well-functioning democracy needs a diversity of opinions, and it is important that everyone, regardless of their political views, have the same opportunity to

speak their mind an share their opinions. Exchanging opinions is overall important in order to have public and open debates. Still, the liberal democracy has caused big challenges when it comes the boundary between free speech and hate speech. Good and constructive debates require the ability and willingness to listen to others, accept opinions that conflict with one's own values, and respect people regardless of their political standpoint. Unfortunately, Facebook debates do not represent this "democratic ideal", and political debates in news comment sections have become an arena where hate speech, net hate (netthets) and harassment has become central part of the debate climate. This has led to a more polarized debate where extremes (ytterpunkter) meet extremes (Trædal, 2018).

Freedom of speech means that we should accept utterances that are both provocative and annoying. Still, freedom of speech also involves a responsibility to safeguard human dignity. Utterance responsibility means that we are still responsible for not spreading utterances that weaken people's human dignity and make the less worth than others. People are entitled to respect, and according to human rights, no one has the right to humiliate anyone (Rosen, 2012; cited in Nilsen, 2014, p.22). This means that we must create and maintain constructive criticism and factual exchange of opinion. Many political debates on social media have an extremely "harsh" tone, where insults and name-calling is part of the conversations. If the debate culture makes people not wanting to participate because they afraid they will receive ugly and hurtful comments, it weakens the democracy. In addition, journalists and editors have a particular responsibility. Hateful speech does neither reinforce the democracy nor the debate, and utterance responsibility is not the same as limiting freedom of speech.

In order to reduce the scope of hate speech and harassment online, Facebook has also updated several measures. Last year, Facebook went one step further and published a set of international guidelines for community standards: guidelines moderators use to police and ban people from the social network. According to Facebooks moderation guidelines that Facebook posted, hate speech is not tolerated, and does - according to Facebook - create a frightening and exclusive atmosphere. In some cases, hate speech may also encourage to violence and violent crimes in real life. The guideline states:

> "We define hate speech as content that directly attacks other people based on what we can protective characteristics – race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, gender, gender identity and serious illness or physical disability. We

also have a certain protection for people with immigrant status. We define attacks as violent or dehumanizing speech, declarations of inferiority or encourage to exclusion or segregation" (Facebook.com).

Facebook also encourages its users to report content they consider harmful under various criteria. When receiving reported content, Facebook will, based on internal rules, decide whether or it violates its community standards. In addition, Facebook uses a country-specific blocking system that acts in accordance with each country's legislation in terms of removing undesirable pages. For instance, Nazi content is forbidden in Germany but allowed in the United States, which means that "social networking platforms play a significant role as cultural intermediaries because their capacity to decide what content should be allowed is a "real and substantive" intervention into our understanding of public discourse and freedom of expression (Gillespie, 2010; Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016, p.1170).

Even though Facebook is working to minimize hate speech on their platforms by establishing updated policies and community standards, the scope of hate speech in Facebook debates is still a big problem in today's society. Combating hate speech on social media is extremely difficult, not only because Facebook has over a billion users worldwide, but also due to legal boundaries between free speech and hate speech. Still, In Norway several campaigns and measures against online hate speech have been done. For example a few years ago, Kripos (the National Unit for Fighting Organized and Other Serious Crime) created their own Facebook patrol, the "web patrol", in order to try to reduce the scope of hate speech, bullying, and harassment on social media platforms.

Over the past couple of years, online hate speech its negative effects on the democracy has also gained more attention in both political and social debates, something I believe is a positive development. Overall, hate speech is about discrimination, polarization, and exclusion, and can be a mobilizing factor into violence and radicalization.

5.2 Final reflections

To make sense of hate speech senders and their hate speech comments is not an easy task. Nevertheless, I have with this thesis wanted to contribute to research on the hate speech

senders, with emphasis on language and discourse, in order to examine the senders' perceptions and understanding of the society as a whole. The main focus in this thesis has been to examine how the senders, through language and their own reality perception, construct a counter-hegemonic discourse, and what the discursive characteristics in these utterances are. In sum, the senders' counter-discourse can be seen as a collective source of motivation to dismantle and delegitimize hegemonic power, as well as a way to defend their act of writing and publishing their comments in public debates on Facebook.

I will end this thesis by discussing what I see as strengths and limitations in this project. One of the strengths was that there were multiple research on this topic from beginning with, which made it easier to build create a theory chapter to build my thesis around. I also believe that the assignment in total gives a concrete and clear answer to the research question itself, and that choice of method has given me a good content of data material to use in the analysis. Nevertheless, I also believe that such research has certain limitations. When it comes to discourse analysis, the very purpose of this research was to gain qualitative insight into, and provide an overview of the senders' negative attitudes and perceptions about the society as a whole (in this case: their perceptions about Muslims, minorities, the political governance, and media's role in the society). This was done through observation and interpretation of the senders' comments.

Interpretation of information that is collected through this analysis, may in such context be seen as »invalid», as it may involve the subjectivity or biasness of the researcher, og fare for misinterpretations. In many ways, discourse analysis itself can be described as an interpretation of interpretation, more specifically "an interpretation of the interpretive work people have done in specific contexts" (Gee, 2010, p.122). Yet he further points out that it does not necessarily mean that such an analysis is subjective, but that such interpretations should be open to further disputes and discussions.

In such a context, hate speech can be interpreted differently from person to person. This also applies to the senders' intention. Through discourse analysis, I have interpreted the sender's comments based on what has immediately been written, and meaning and message and behind the speech act itself. Nevertheless, the analysis cannot tell me the *true intentions* behind these statements, as the motivation for publishing such comments may differ from person to person.

For example, this may just as well be people who find it fun to provoke others (trolls), where their political opinions do not necessarily reflect their statements on Facebook. Overall, I think discourse analysis is a valid method to investigate how language constructs discourses, and that such discourse can help us form a clear image of the senders' general attitudes and reality perceptions. Still, discourse cannot be solely seen as a motivation factor for posting hate speech comments, as discourse analysis cannot not give concrete answers to the sender's motivation alone.

I also found some limitations in the secondary research method (content analysis). Here I encountered particular limitations when it came to sampling the senders' age. Earlier mentioned how I decided to do an "estimated age calculation" instead of gathering the senders' exact age by conducting a quantitative survey. Therefore I conducted a roughly age estimation based on the senders' Facebook profile and photos, and divided them into five different age groups. Even though I argue that such estimated calculation can give a relatively accurate overview of which age group is behind the most of the hate speech comments that can be found in news comment sections Facebook, I still think that a there is a limitation when it comes to validity and generalizability. This limitation also goes with determining the exact ethnicity or national background of the senders, and needs more qualitative empirical research.

5.2.1 Further research

Even though "hate speech senders" is a topic that has been researched more over the past few years, I believe that it would be appropriate to do more research on the senders with more focus on the "radicalization" process. Why do they have such opinions? And how did they become that way? Many claim that radicalization and extremism is often tied to "lone wolves", poor upbringing, and the feeling of exclusion. It would be very interesting to do more research on "the process in between".

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