

# What is happening?

**On online participatory journalism and news framing in the first two weeks of the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza conflicts of 2022 and 2023**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Current Mondial geopolitical affairs have seen an increase in public and governmental involvement with military conflicts within western societies. This thesis is concerned with two military conflicts: the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2022, and the Israel-Gaza conflict of 2023. Within this thesis, these two conflicts are researched through the concept of participatory journalism, and framing narratives. As social media are a significant part of individuals' lives in western Europe, and the Netherlands specifically, this thesis is concerned with how these individuals disseminate news on the social media platform Instagram with a focus on the account 'NOSStories' which is curated by the public broadcaster NOS. This thesis aims to explore the forms in which participatory journalism is manifested in the comment sections of posts related to the two military conflicts especially from a point of interaction and deliberation in discussions. This was done through a thematic content analysis of these comment sections. The themes were based on four dimensions: Universalism, Inclusivity, Rationalism, and Agreement. Key findings of the analysis are that the comment sections show low levels of deliberation and a high level of negatively loaded comments. These behaviours were determined to be linked to a low level of emotional moderation, and general deliberation and civility by NOSStories. Additionally, the results from the posts about the Israel-Gaza conflict showed higher levels of engagement and interaction than the posts about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This difference was only observed within this thesis, but an explanation may be researched in future research. The conclusions of this thesis further inform academics on the workings of participatory journalism on online social media platforms, and helps gain insight into how online news posts are disseminated by an audience. Furthermore, the thesis provides news organisations with insights into potential inadequacies in their own behaviours regarding moderation of comment sections in the context of deliberate discussions by audience members, to which they can choose to accept or reject adjustments.

**KEYWORDS:** *participatory journalism, framing, Gaza, Ukraine, Instagram*

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## **1. Introduction**

Two topics in recent European news have been the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. Not only are governments directly involved in these conflicts, citizens of European countries -through news consumption- appear to feel involved as well. A high number of individuals consume their news through social media channels. According to the Dutch report Mediamonitor, 58% of Dutch citizens get their news from social media platforms in 2023 (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2023, p.36). As military conflicts are highly partisan in nature (i.e. one is expected to pick a side to support (Liu, 2018, p.279)), discussion forums such as the comment sections of news outlet posts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok provide apt technological affordances for individuals to engage in discourse with the news post. This engagement, also classified as part of participatory journalism (Engelke, 2019, p.31-32), extends to engagement between journalists and users, and between users themselves.

As social media platforms are designed around interaction, the comment sections and accompanying discourse and engagement contribute to shaping understanding about topic(s) of the accompanying content that is posted. However, different topics instigate different responses. When a topic is bipartisan in nature, as military conflicts inherently are, a discussion forum may form itself similarly or may instead become a place of civil discourse and (dis)agreement. This thesis aims to study the Instagram posts and comment sections of the Dutch account NOSStories regarding participatory journalism in order to explore the nature of the discussions that take place between audience members, and between audience members and the journalists that are behind NOSStories. The NOS is the Dutch public broadcasting network, of which NOSStories is a subchannel aimed at distributing news on Instagram. As the network is non-commercial, it is generally viewed as a more neutral platform aimed at all Dutch citizens. The account was therefore selected, as it may provide the most diverse audience responses. Additionally, as the topic of the discussions are directly linked to the topic of the news post, this thesis includes the concept of framing in its analysis. Ding et al. (2023, p.161) studied the relation of off- and online framing in news, and the occurrences of polarity in online public discourse and found that partisan division impacts polarization in online discussion forums. The inclusion of framing in this thesis may therefore further the understanding of the results of the analysis of the comment section by understanding that individuals may perceive certain language choices as framing based on their existing beliefs and attitudes and respond accordingly.

This thesis contributes to further understanding of the processes that take place in the

covert and abstract realm of social media. Each individual follows a different set of off-and online channels and accordingly receives news through the aggregate of these channels. However, this process is difficult to map. When congestion occurs on a discussion board such as the comment section of an Instagram post, it can be observed how the differently formed opinions come together and how individuals interact in accordance with others' opinions and shared information.

Furthermore, this thesis helps gain insight into how social media platforms are used to process and deliver news. This thesis' results can be used to further develop insights into the role of the audiences regarding perceptions of- and interactions with news; in particular news subjects that evoke strong emotional responses such as the aforementioned military conflicts.

This thesis aims to answer the following research question(s):

*'How does NOSSstories and its audience interact in the context of participatory journalism in posts about the ongoing Ukraine-Russia- and the Israel-Hamas conflict within the first two weeks after the inciting incident.'*

This research question will be answered through four sub-questions:

1. *'How do the interactions between audiences themselves, and audience and the journalists representing the account NOSSstories take place in the context of participatory journalism?'*

2. *'What is the role of framing within the posts themselves and the accompanying comment section?'*

3. *'What are the differences in interaction between the posts and the accompanying comment sections of the posts about the respective conflicts?'*

4. *'What are the manners in which NOSSstories utilizes the technological possibilities of Instagram in regards to the stage three interactivity of participatory journalism?'*

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In this chapter, three main academic themes are discussed. Firstly, the concept of participatory journalism is explored, after which framing will be discussed. Lastly, context of the military conflicts used as case study in this thesis will be explored through the concepts of (war) framing and journalistic approaches.

### **2.1. Participatory Journalism**

Engelke (2019, p.31) explains the term ‘participatory journalism’. She states that the term is not used consistently, defining it as “audience participation in the news production process within professional journalistic contexts”, and subsequently distinguishing it from merely citizen journalism (i.e. autonomous audience production of news without professional involvement) (Engelke, 2019, p.31-32). She explains that the audience participation in participatory journalism can be segmented into three stages: formation, dissemination, and interpretation. Mentzel et al., (2024, p.964) elaborate on the notion of participation by describing engagement. They name ‘casual engagement’ as being involved in the news process through interaction with online newsposts, e.g. liking, commenting on, or sharing a post. The three stages as described by Engelke (2019, p.31) will be further explored below.

The first stage of participatory journalism is ‘formation’. This includes financing of journalistic undertakings, audience influence on news subject selection, news subject selection based on audience data metrics, audience contribution of actual content (textual, or through pictures/videos), content gained through crowdsourcing, and finally actual news pieces written by audience members (Engelke, 2019, p.32; Mentzel et al., 2024, p.964).

Heinonen (2011, p.35) explains that the audience-journalist relationship is a traditionally segregated one. However, though the emergence of online interactive communication, the borders of this relationship have become blurred. He explains that the use of the term ‘audience’ in online journalism could easily be replaced by ‘user’ pertaining to interaction with news content (Heinonen, 2011, p.35). He states that the use of the term ‘user’ is more apt, as it more elaborately explains the increased agency of the audience regarding news consumption. Uth et al. (2023, p.10) expand upon this notion by explaining that a journalism-audience relationship is not only based on news consumption, but rather a social exchange wherein journalists provide the audiences with news and information, while the audience members offer attention and appreciation in return. From the perspective of participatory journalism, it could be argued that the audience provides the journalists also with news contributions and/or feedback on the news (Engelke, 2019, p.32; Mentzel et al.,

2024, p.964). Audiences actively seek out their own sources and use this increased agency to add to- or suggest alterations to news content. Heinonen further explains that -in contrast to the traditional one-way street of news communication- the technological affordances of online news production allows for a two-way street characterized by collaboration and interactivity as opposed to passive consumption (Heinonen, 2011, p.36; Hermida, 2011, p.180; Mentzel et al., 2024, p.964; Pignard-Cheynel & Amigo, 2023, p.2612). This dynamic shift in the audience-journalist relationship exposes a consequential shift in the power relations between the two (Uth et al., 2023, p.7). The journalists' main source of the power was the gatekeeping of information. This is no longer the case, as they are under higher levels of scrutiny by the users (audiences), empowered to seek out their own sources of information.

In fact, because of this empowerment, gatekeeping information could be regarded by some users as malintent. They aim to be taken more seriously, which starts with being taken more into consideration by journalists regarding the production of news (e.g. user-sent letters or news stories)(Engelke, 2023, p.614). However, journalists tend to see users' additions as opinions, not always reliable, and not necessarily useful to the production of 'actual reporting' (Heinonen, 2011, p.41; Hendrickx, 2022, p.3). This dynamic creates friction due to an expectation discrepancy: the news users want to feel valued in the news production process, while the journalists see less value in their contributions during the production process, and see more value after the production process in the form of feedback, discussion, or other forms of interactivity (Heinonen, 2011, p.41; Uth et al., 2023, p.13).

The dynamic of audiences' contributions to the news production process and the journalism reception of these contributions is further elaborated on by Hermida (2011, p.184). He explains that this dynamic is a complex one, as individuals differ (both audience members and journalists), but other actors in the production process such as editors are also involved. The journalists themselves, but also the editors can be of high influence over the gatekeeping of news content. Hermida (2011, p.183) and Engelke (2023, p.613) explain that the involvement of the audience in the production process is highly curated by the newsroom. However, Hermida (2011, p.183) also describes the struggle of news organisations with the multitude of unsolicited submissions, causing those of value to be lost. Overall, news organisations show reluctance to the involvement of audiences in the news agenda itself (Engelke, 2023, p.613). This may be also why submissions such as audience stories, photos/videos, or sent in text messages are implemented into the news

production as a form of illusory involvement, devoid of profound meaning but regarded involvement nonetheless.

Stage two is called 'dissemination', which Engelke (2019, p.32-33) describes as consisting of basic interaction (i.e. reading, liking, sharing, rating, etc.) with a news post on the website of the news organisation itself, or the practice of these basic interactions on an external website/platform (Engelke, 2019, p.32). This form of participation does not involve overt contributions to the distributed news as with the contributions of stage three (interpretation), but revolves around interactions with the news posts themselves. The value for news producers herein lies solely with the data metrics side of the interactions (e.g. amount of time spent reading or number of times shared with others). The news organisations can derive information about their content from e.g. how many times a piece of content is read, or shared, meaning that they can gather information on which topics can boost popularity or audience retention (Domingo et al., 2008, p.330-331).

Engelke (2019, p.33) describes stage three (interpretation) to be fully driven by the respective agency of the individual audience participant as opposed to data metric driven stage two described above. Whereas in stage two, mostly quantitative data is collected and analysed, stage three provides a feedback loop driven by qualitative data. In this stage, the principle of 'the death of the author' -i.e. meaning of a text is determined by the audience interpretation as opposed to the intention of the author- is applicable at this point in the process as the news content has been fully produced and subsequently distributed meaning that the audience now derives meaning from the text that it is presented with. Apart from the production phase in stage one (albeit highly regulated by the news organisations), stage three is the stage wherein the audience has the most agency over the news content (Engelke, 2019, p.33). Domingo (2011, p.79-80) explains that the interpretation stage is characterized by the freedom of interaction for the users, and the need for moderation by the news publisher in order to deter unwanted comments. This is a delicate dynamic as taking away freedom may cause negative responses from the audience.

Domingo (2011, p.88-90) further explains that in order to successfully interact and moderate as a news publisher, the user should be regarded as a real human that requires understanding; this sounds quite logical, but requires the organisation('s representatives) to level with the users as if it were a regular dialogue (Nelson & Schmidt, 2022, p.5844). Domingo (2011, p.90-92) additionally explains that, while moderating the comments is desirable, interactivity between user and journalist is not necessary, as the comment section can be regarded as a discussion forum for users between themselves. Additionally, Domingo



(2011, p.93) highlights two ways a comment section can be regarded by the newsroom: participatory journalism as playground, and participatory journalism as source.

These two considerations are distinguished as follows: participatory journalism as playground is characterized by a more 'laissez faire' approach, whereby the user contributions are considered separate from the rest of the website (a designated discussion forum) with loose moderation and the possibility for users to discuss topics more freely (Uth et al., 2023, p.8-9). the approach of participatory journalism as source, in contrast, views user contributions as actual contributions to the news. On one hand, this means that the users are taken more seriously. On the other hand, it means that off-topic contributions are not allowed, and a more strict approach to moderating is taken regarding the contributions and interactions of the users (Domingo, 2011, p.88-93; Uth et al., 2023, p.8-9).

The internet and accompanying social structures and behaviours have much evolved in the past decade and especially stage three can be expanded upon. Engelke (2020, p.448) explains that online discussions taking place in the comment section of a news post can be seen as both participatory journalism and audience participation. Engelke (2020, p.447-448) emphasizes the importance of deliberation in discussions under democratic principles, and divides online discussions into deliberate and non-deliberate. The deliberation in online discussions is further explored by Schäfer et al. (2024, p.1420), who explain that deliberate comments based in facts and evidence increases the audience members knowledge about a topic, but do not necessarily contribute to the willingness to participate in discussions as an individual may feel less knowledgeable which stimulates a decrease in participation intention. Non-deliberate behaviour is inherently increased in the online sphere due to the anonymous and deindividualized nature of online profiles (Davis, 2002; Shmargad et al., 2022, p.15). Engelke (2020, p.450) explains that there is no single definition for deliberation, but states that there is general agreement in academia that (non-) deliberate behaviour can be divided into four categories: universalism, inclusivity, rationalism, and agreement (Engelke, 2020, p.450). She also explains that there are four ways for a user to interact with a (news) post, taking into consideration the option to not interact at all: active use (i.e. writing comments), passive use (i.e. reading comments), active non-use (i.e. not writing comments, and passive non-use (i.e. not reading comments).

However, this distinction can be regarded incomplete as well as confusing. There are multiple forms of passive use due to technological affordances of online discussion forums. An individual can choose to like a comment, like the post itself, or conversely dislike or even report a comment post, or user (Shmargad et al., 2022, p.5). These are more extreme

forms of audience participation, but can fall into the four categories nonetheless. These behaviours can be seen as form of (dis)agreement, one of the subcategories of deliberation, and heavily influence the deliberate nature of a comment section. Additionally, Engelke's (2020, p.448-449) description of online (non-)deliberate behaviour assumes a willingness to act in accordance with (non-)deliberation; while not all audience participants are willing to agree to the social contract of a (deliberate) comment section. The notion of online civility is based on a mutual agreement of a specific social contract by all participants (Bormann, 2022, p.13). Continuing in line with the work of Engelke (2020, p.448-449), Bormann (2022, p.13), Shmargad et al. (2022, p.5), and Schäfer et al., (2024, p.1420) the following can be postulated: when individuals act outside of this contract, the consequence may provoke the concepts of foot-in-the-door and the slippery slope fallacy, where the social contract is broken and a new social contract is established through reactions from other individuals on the initial individual.

## **2.2. Framing**

This thesis will adopt the definition framing from Entman (2003, p. 417): “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.” Entman (2003, p.417) explains that the images and words within a specific frame can be separated from the rest of the news to the extent of their role as a stimulant of proposition or opposition of a certain topic. He states that the words and images used in a frame are highly salient: noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged.

Lecheler and de Vreese (2019, p.18-20) explain that within this practice of frame-building, there are three types of actors: stakeholders, journalists, and citizens. Additionally, they explain that frame-building develops through interaction between journalists and the stakeholders/citizens. There are two factors that these frames are comprised of: internal (i.e. editorial policies and news values), and external (i.e. influences from stakeholders/citizens). The types of frame can be further contextualised as ‘frame setting’ (i.e. journalists’ interpretations) and ‘frame sending’ (interpretations by others) (Brüggeman, 2014, p.). Lecheler and de Vreese (2019, p.3-4) additionally distinguish frames from perspective of their contents into the categories ‘issue-specific’ and ‘generic’. The former type of frame is when certain frames are pertinent to specific circumstances (e.g. using wording related to weapons in the context of military conflict), while the latter of the two distinctive frames can be related to a variety of topics and issues. Furthermore, they emphasize the notion of

‘framing effect’, which they explain takes place when a frame affects an individual’s frame in thought (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019, p.3). Therefore, in order to understand the role of framing, it is of importance to distinguish the role within different scale of communication. If any individual frame is on a micro level, a framing narrative (i.e. repetition of the same frame(s) by a e.g. one newspaper or social group) can be regarded as meso level; lastly, when a narrative is repeated by a large group of communicators (e.g. all / most national news outlets), the frame setting has reached a macro level. Regarding the scale in which frame effects can be observed, mass media can be highly influential on a population’s meaning-making. McLeod and Detenber (1999, p.4) state that an audience actively creates meaning from multiple sources (i.e. e.g. news outlets or social groups).

The upscaling of frames can have immediate effect on people. As Roediger and Butler (2011, p.20-25) found, longer exposure to information leads to a more profound memory retention of said information. More importantly, memory retrieval practice in conjunction with the multiple exposures through internal motivation proved to be highly effective for memory retention (Roediger & Butler, 2011, p.20-25). This finding is corroborated by Chaban et al. (2023, p.419) who applied it to strategic narrative in Russian propaganda news. This notion cannot be homogenized too rapidly, however, as individuals are constantly adjusting their beliefs, taking into account multiple sources in order to perform meaning-making regarding subjects and themes important to them. However, as Chaban et al. (2023, p.420) illustrate, when all news sources provide the same information, the beliefs that individuals have are more likely to remain the same.

Shaw et al. (1999, p.3) explain that this meaning-making is to be regarded as irrational rather than rational, as people are heavily influenced by their social groups. They name the concept of agenda setting as a process that explains frame repetition from the initiative of the ‘powerful’ media (Gilardi et al., 2021, p.42; Minooie et al., 2023, p.02; McCombs et al., 2014, p.782). Powerful in this context pertaining to the gatekeeping of information that outlets may exert, thus attaining control over the information that is made available to the public. Agenda setting can therefore be seen as a combination of framing and gatekeeping. However, this control appears to be illusional as individuals have a strong need to be a part of social groups and therefore are more prone to accept information from those groups and adjust their beliefs accordingly (Minooie et al., 2023, p.02; Shaw et al., 1999, p.3). The power therefore may be considered to be in the hands of the actors that are seen as most influential in each respective social group (Gilardi et al., 2021, p.42). Furthermore, they explain that being part of a group is inherently rewarding because it

provides an individual with a sense of belonging through shared beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences, even when the group membership is damaging to any individual member (e.g. smoking cigarettes) (Shaw et al., 1999, p.5). Additionally, they argue that being exposed to information or events that challenge the shared values of the group, cognitive and social dissonance emerge in the individual and consequently in (a part of) the group. Shaw et al. (1999, p.5-7) explain that this social phenomenon is especially applicable to news consumption through the concept ‘agenda melding’. This concept applies when news created by news producers is consumed and (not) questioned and whether it is adopted into existing attitudes, beliefs and values of individuals through their membership of social groups (Shaw et al., 1999, p.5-7). Due to the covert nature of online groups, agenda melding can influence a large amount of individuals. This is exemplified by Nobre et al. (2020, p.264), who studied news sharing behaviours in large groups on the messaging platform Whatsapp. They found that these groups, although subject to change in group memberships, have a strong central membership base consisting of individuals that remain in the group over longer periods of time. Additionally, they found that these individuals are persistent in efforts contributing to further spread of information. While this may be harmless for some types of information, Minooie et al. (2023, p.14) found that Twitter users mainly relied on traditional media and social media regarding information surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak as opposed to personal experiences. This means that membership to certain online groups may shape the opinions formed by an individual solely based on the notion that the information was shared in a group that an individual is a member of.

While not widely available or applicable when Shaw et al. published their paper in 1999, current times has experienced the emergence of the internet and subsequently the current popular social media platforms. Gónzalez-Bailón and Lelkes (2022, p.159-160) explain that the avoid dissonance behaviour described by Shaw et al. (1999, p.7) applies to these platforms through online social group forming and accompanying partly in the form of the notion of ‘echo chambers’, which Cinelli et al. (2021, p.1) define as (online) environments in which the opinion, attitude, or belief of a user about a subject is reinforced due to repeated interactions with other users or content that shares similar opinions, attitudes, or beliefs. However, Gónzalez-Bailón and Lelkes (2022, p.160) suggest that echo chambers may not only arise from avoid dissonance behaviour, but also from algorithmic linkage through a process named ‘People you may know’ which is described as the social media platform suggesting content and accounts based on the user’s engagement behaviour (i.e. e.g. accounts followed, posts liked, comments placed, content shared, etc.). This notion

is confirmed by Cinelli et al. (2021, p.5), who researched interaction homophily in online interaction networks in 100 million pieces of content over 4 social media platforms. They concluded that homophilic clusters of users dominate online dynamics, meaning an indication of the presence of echo chambers in social networks. G3n3alez-Bail3n and Lelkes (2022, p.168) additionally explain that when individuals find themselves in echo chambers, they will become more ideologically polarized through three mechanisms: echo chambers contain a limited argument pool which is also one sided; the echo chamber functions as a social group, which makes individuals more prone to social pressure in order to feel as justifiably belonging to the group; when individuals are surrounded by others in a group that hold the same values, attitudes, and beliefs, they become more convinced that those are the ‘correct’ ones (G3n3alez-Bail3n & Lelkes, 2022, p.168-169).

As illustrated by Shaw et al. (1999, p.5-7), individuals that are a member of a specific social group will attempt to persuade other individuals into joining the social group by convincing them of its communal attitudes, beliefs, and values. Cinelli et al. (2021, p.5) and G3n3alez-Bail3n and Lelkes (2022, p.168-169) show that echo chambers are inherently homophilic in user interaction which consequently fortifies the belief of the people in the echo chamber social group that their shared attitudes, beliefs, and values are the correct ones.

### **2.3. War framing and the Russia-Ukraine & Gaza conflicts**

Firstly, it is important to understand what war framing is, and how it fits within the broader concept of framing. War framing can be employed in a larger narrative in which an enemy is defined, and wherein there is a ‘battle to be won’ (Benziman, 2020, p.249). Benziman explains this within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the pandemic itself was the enemy with which people were battling to overcome, but Chaban et al. (2023, p.419) provide similar insight into the Russo-Ukrainian war that started in 2022. They state that an antagonistic narrative can be considered a precursor to justification of military conflict.

While these types of narratives provide insight into how a governmental institution can employ war framing to justify a military cause, it is also of significance to consider how they communicate this to the populace. Entman (2003, p.418-421) explains the model of Cascading Activation, wherein the source of the information (e.g. a government) trickles the information down to the journalist that eventually processes the information. This is especially relevant during wartime when the a government exerts heavy influence over the information that is shared for example to avoid multiple unwanted consequences such as

sharing information with an opposing party, or mass hysteria among the population. Amer (2017, p.2) studied traditional news reporting of the Gaza war of 2008-2009 and found evidence of the Cascading Activation model within news reporting and the US and UK governmental foreign policy and the news reporting of this war. Amer (2017, p.8) points out the focus on Israeli 'benevolence' exemplified by ceasefire offers as well as a focus on damnification of Hamas and corresponding justification of Israeli countermeasures against Hamas separate from the Palestine civilian populace. Amer (2017, p.8) found that this framing narrative proved favourable for Israel's justification narrative, and insufficient for US and UK audiences as they were unable to learn about all sides of the war. Alkalliny (2017, p.162) corroborates this stance through identification of a strong bias by CNN and FOX News on the Gaza conflict of 2014 and the Al-Aqsa events of 2017 which appeared to align with the respective countries' foreign policies on the events.

While the Cascading Activation model by Entman (2003, p.418-421) remains applicable to traditional news production channels, the emergence of social media appears to undermine the trickle-down effect inherent to the model (Durani et al., 2023, p.415-416). This is illustrated by Yarchi & Boxman-Shabtai (2023, p.18) in the case of TikTok framing in the Israel-Palestine conflict in 2021. They found that reliance on mimetics and intertextuality in TikTok posts created a large multilayered corpus of meanings, heavily dependent on the viewer's prior knowledge. These were TikTok videos created by private citizens and through the ability to share them online, they were able to reach audiences that would not have had access to this information by traditional means of news distribution. According to Durani et al. (2023, p.415), this may also be concerning, as visual content is inherently persuasive and manipulative. They also found that the audience performs acts of gatekeeping through a process of selective popularity within content (i.e. high engagement and interaction on social media platforms boost visibility). They state that content becomes highly visible through interaction with a piece of content based on a social reality that an audience embraces, which may form through unconscious biases the audiences hold, especially during polarising events such as military conflict (Durani et al., 2023, p.415).

Manor and Crilley (2018, p.369) explain that, with the presence of governmental institutions on social media, there is less journalistic scrutiny as these institutions are able to use these platforms as a direct source-to-audience tool to legitimise policies, as illustrated with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Gaza war of 2014 (Lev-On, 2018, p.6; Manor & Crilley, 2018, p.369). Additionally, Lev-On (2018, p.10-11) explains that during the 2014 Gaza war, discourse on Facebook pertaining to the war would not only shape

online discourse, but subsequently shaped offline discourses. Taking into account the aforementioned lack of scrutiny of information combined with an increased perceived trustworthiness of content shared by acquaintances of an individual, news coverage on social media is highly prone to misinformation and rumours and an increased difficulty in ability to refute them (Lev-On, 2018, p.10-11). When regarding military conflicts specifically, Manor and Crilley (2018, p.370) explain that there is an inherent frame of 'picking a side'. This is confirmed by Shahzad et al. (2023, p.10-12), who found that between 2019-2022, the BBC and CNN included a more pro-Israel rhetoric, while Al-Jazeera used more pro-Palestine framing. Lev-On (2018, p.6-7) found a theme of hate speech to be a highly salient frame used by traditional media outlets. Lev-On (2018, p.3-5) explains that hate speech can be more easily spread online due to e.g. the use of covert groups in which like-minded individuals influence and strengthen certain beliefs within these groups, consequently creating an environment wherein e.g. death threats are acceptable to express towards people that hold opposite beliefs (e.g. sympathy towards Gaza residents) (Lev-On, 2018, p.7). This is an example of the concept of the 'echo chamber', which was discussed previously. The danger herein lies that online discourses and acceptable forms of expression transfer to offline settings, potentially resulting in violence (Lev-On, 2018, p.7).

With controlling narrative framing in war situations comes influence over how the sides are portrayed. Baudrillard (1991, p.61-87) famously wrote that 'the Gulf war did not happen', wherein he discussed that the news coverage dictates whether or not events exist for the news audience. He describes the Gulf war as "a lobotomy of an experimental enemy away from the field of battle with no possibility of reaction." (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 61). In a sense, framing in war narrative works comparably to Baudrillard's description of informational gatekeeping of the Gulf war. The Russo-Ukrainian war does not exist as it is 'a special military operation'. Ukrainian children were 'rescued for their own safety' (RTL Nieuws, 2023). News coverage seems to become a tug of war on factualities within war narratives with two clear sides, but how it is covered appears to determine which side is correct in the public's eye. Nygren et al. (2016, p.5-6), explain that, specifically regarding the Ukraine-Russia conflict of 2014, there are clear distinctions in framing between the different stakeholders they analysed (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Sweden). Ukrainian news focused on the conflict itself, Russian news mainly supported the position of the Russian government. Polish and Swedish news covered the sanctions and other international dimensions, but with Swedish news mainly covering the downing of MH17 (Nygren et al., 2016, p.6). Additionally, Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017, p.359) show that the framing of

the conflicts differs heavily between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian online communities. They state that due to the technological affordances of social media that allow for online segregation facilitate mutually exclusive views on the conflict, with pro-Ukrainian communities framing the conflict as a limited military action, and the pro-Russian communities framing it as a full-on war against the Russian population of Eastern Ukraine (Makhortykh & Sydorova, 2017, p.367-369).

With the emergence of TikTok as a highly influential audiovisual-centric social platform, the participation of content creators as propagators of news has been expanded upon, as Primig et al. (2023, p.5-6) illustrate. They state that content creators employ recontextualization of audiovisual content by remixing trending ‘sounds’ such as music with visuals from the conflict in a stylized manner. Additionally, emotional cuing is used in order to clarify to the audience which emotional response is sought out or appropriate (Primig et al., 2023, p.7-8).



### **3. Method**

In this chapter, the methodological choices of this thesis are expanded upon. First, the methods of data collection and analysis will be elaborated, followed by the sampling procedure of the posts and comments used, and lastly a discussion follows on the ethics, and control measures on reliability and validity.

#### **3.1. Research design**

##### *3.1.1. Choice of method*

A qualitative research approach is used in order to be able to examine the units of analysis from a contextual perspective, in accordance with the research question. As explained by Entman (2003, p.417), part of the elevated saliency of frames is that they are emotionally charged. Especially within the inherently partisan nature of military conflict news coverage (Liu, 2018, p.296). Additionally, Engelke (2020, p.453) addresses deliberation in online discussion, for which a qualitative approach provides better understanding of the interpersonal interactions (partly) anonymously taking place on an online discussion platform. As Brennen (2017, p.13-16) explains, qualitative research is well suited to study the ideas, insights, thoughts, and perceptions of individuals in their interactions with news posts, other interactors, and possibly the account's representatives. Additionally, as Schreier (2012, p.20-21) emphasises, qualitative research is interpretive in nature. This is well suited for this thesis, as it does not aim to explain why or how many times certain semiotic choices are made, but rather aims to find meaning in the interactions and discourse displayed in- and beneath these posts (Schreier, 2012, p.22). Furthermore, qualitative research allows for reflexivity as opposed to pure objectivity, which applies as studying the samples means becoming part of the audience. Therefore, it has been important to be able to reflect on the role of researcher during the effectuation of this study (Schreier, 2012, p.23).

This thesis has an exploratory nature, as the aim of the thesis has been to research more about a certain phenomenon. Thematic analysis allows for the researcher to uncover themes in the units of analysis while maintaining certain flexibility over the themes encountered (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). The discovery of these themes within the units of analysis has allowed for the creation and recognition of patterns. These patterns in turn allow for the answering of the research questions posed in this thesis as they help with the understanding of the perceptions of the individuals in the comment section (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.80). Critical discourse analysis as understood from Machin and Mayr (2012, p.4-6)

was considered, but as this thesis is not concerned with the schisms of military conflicts and the accompanying discourses, thematic analysis was considered more appropriate.

### *3.1.2. Operationalisation*

Schreier (2012, p.24) explains that a qualitative content analysis is a suitable method for research that has emergent flexibility. This means that during the course of the research, the researcher can retain adaptability. This thesis employed an inductive content analysis, which Schreier (2012, p.24) describes as closely related to emergent flexibility. The adaptability necessary for inductive research, was necessary to give the researcher of this thesis the opportunity to retain flexibility during the coding process, but also during the data analysis process. The key codes and concepts are based on Engelke (2020, p.450). She describes potential discussions within four dimensions: universalism, inclusivity, rationalism, agreement. These four dimension were further divided into sub-dimensions. The subdimensions are as follows:

- Universalism: gatekeeping, ad-hominem, privilege
- Inclusivity: in/outgroup, societal marginalisation, respect for different opinion(s)
- Rationalism: emotional response, source naming / stating facts, appeal to logic
- Agreement: accept/reject new information, attempt to diffuse conflict, asking a question

For an overview of these dimensions with signal words/phrases that emerged from the sample, please view Appendix A.

## **3.2. Sampling**

This thesis employed a qualitative thematic content analysis of Instagram posts and subsequent interactive comments on these posts. This means that the sampling does not have to be generalizable (Marshall, 1996, p.523). However, as the timeframe of two weeks serves a purpose within the larger narrative, a methodical approach to sampling can increase the value of insights gathered from the analysis. In accordance with Marshall (1996, p.523), judgement sampling was employed by selecting the samples incrementally within the two-week timeframe, with increments of 1 day (i.e. 1 post per day for the first two weeks). This approach minimizes biased selection, while ensuring that there was enough content for the analysis.

As the Instagram account covers general current affairs, a selection was made from all posts to select only the posts that cover the conflicts discussed in this thesis. An overview

of all posts discussing this topic was first made, after which the methodical selection procedure on posts and comments was applied to this population. Finally, as the first period after the start of a conflict may contain confusion and scarcity of information, the first two weeks of the respective conflicts were chosen as the timeframe in which the posts were selected.

Subsequently, the comments were selected based on relevance. Relevance in this context does not pertain to content-related relevance, but rather a relevance in order to provide enough data regarding the interactions that take place in the comment section. This means that a maximum of 5 main comments were selected per post only when they had at least 5 reactionary comments, with one exception (Ukraine post 4), where not enough comments had the sufficient amount of reactionary comments. In this case, an additional main comment was selected to attempt to close the gap in data with the other posts. This consisted of the first 5 comments and accompanying reactions relevant to this thesis.

### **3.3. Ethics, reliability, validity**

Although the ethics of online qualitative content analysis are less clear than for other forms of research, ethical implications must be taken into account when analysing user-generated content. This thesis has taken into consideration the approach discussed by Burles & Bally (2018, p.3-7). They state that there are no clear ethical rules on online content analysis, but strongly advise researchers to consider the private-public sensitivity of information. Therefore, this thesis upholds the guidelines by the ALLEA (All European Academies, 2023, p.5-12). In this thesis, no full names of people are shared; instead, the commenter's name was coded through a coding reference. This coding reference anonymizes the commenter and can be found in the section 'Results'.

Regarding reliability, Silverman (2011, p.81) states that the research method should be appropriate for the research question(s) posed. Although multiple approaches are possible for this specific research, a qualitative, summative content analysis and accompanying critical discourse analysis appear appropriate as the aim of this study is to interpret and give meaning to the units analysed. Furthermore, this research discloses full transparency of the steps taken in the research, both through basis on existing academic methodologies and apt justification of the process in order to reach a transparent and replicable research (Silverman, 2011, p.84-90). The codebook used for this research can be found in Appendix A

Lastly, Silverman (2011, p.90-91) emphasises that the research approach should measure what is meant to be measured. The validity of this thesis is therefore based on

proven concepts, described by Engelke (2020, p.450). These concepts are employed in this thesis through the research question, which aims to analyse deliberation in comment sections through the four dimensions described in Engelke (2020, p.450).

## 4. Results

In this chapter, the results from data collection and analysis are presented based on the dimensions universalism, individualism, rationality, and agreement by Engelke (2020). A distinction is made between posts regarding Gaza and Ukraine, as well as main comments and replies. To make the discussion easier to follow and to do justice to the responsive and participatory elements, the results are presented with quotes in text, and accompanied by their corresponding coding reference as was used by the researcher in the analysis.

### 4.1. Coding reference

G = Gaza

U = Ukraine

P = Post (1-14 accordingly)

MC = main comment (with additional numbering)

AC = Additional comment (With additional numbering)

### 4.2. Universalism

#### 4.2.1. Gatekeeping

##### 4.2.1.1. Gaza

Considering the presence of gatekeeping, there are four themes that arise from the data: ‘real truth’, right of participation, response rejection, and appeal to labelling. The first theme, ‘real truth’ pertains to the notion that ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ of information lie on a spectrum of nuance and conviction. For instance, GP6MC2 states:

*“Incredible that there are so many Palestine supporters. Do more research man.”*

To which GP6MC2AC1 replies:

*“I recommend that you do your own research and increase insight in truths about Palestine...”*

The recommendation ‘do your own research’, or a similar one, appears at least once in every post. However, the research that the other party is supposed to do appears to be congruent with the belief the recommender holds. GP7MC2AC6:

*“I think you should deepen your knowledge, problem started with israel”.*

GP5MC4AC20 expresses antipathy towards the state of Israel, to which GP5MC4AC21 responds with the recommendation that the former should “...*deepen yourself in history before shouting...*”, apparently in support of the Israel ‘side’.

The second theme is ‘right of participation’, which can be granted or taken away by seemingly anyone. The right of participation means that a commenter can be qualified or disqualified based on what they express in their comment. The qualifications appear to be dependent on the individual passing judgment, and can vary in nature. GP11MC2AC19:

*“...and 2ndly go factcheck first before you shout things that have not been proven.”;*

GP14MC2AC17: *“were you in the resistance? You don’t know what you’re talking about, like most pro Palestine”*

GP13MC5AC2: *“Kim I think you don’t know what is happening the past weeks... for next time think before posting such a stupid reaction...”*

The right of participation is seemingly mainly granted or taken based on how informed one is, but with the requirement that one should be in agreement with the individual passing judgment in order to qualify as contributor.

Theme three -response rejection- arises when an individual ends a discussion. This statement of finality can arise when the other party fails to agree and the opinions are too opposed. GP9MC4AC13:

*“A genocide is taking place and this discussion is pointless. I will no longer discuss this further with you.”*

However, as opposed to another individual, one might also practice response rejection in the larger discussion. GP12MC3AC6, for example, lists information they see as facts and states

*“Sorry I don’t need anymore ‘backtracking’. For me it’s certain what happened here, and Hamas should plead guilty asap before it becomes simply ridiculous”.*

The final theme within gatekeeping is ‘appeal to labelling’. The labelling can take many forms and is discussed later within the main theme of Universalism, but the connection within gatekeeping can be identified through the following data entries:

GP4MC3AC12: *“little kid you have a lot to learn. A little less social media news and just use your brain...”*;

GP14MC5AC36 states: *“... you live in a ‘t Gooi bubble ! Little cargo bike cunt”*.

#### 4.2.1.2. Ukraine

The examples above were only taken from the dataset on Gaza, but regarding the dataset on Ukraine, there are similar comments congruent with the four themes. Real truth is also dependent on which sources an individual has appropriated as true. UP9MC2AC11 states:

*“Go read up on political cases and don’t just make things up”*.

As mentioned before, right of participation can be granted or taken away for various reasons. UP11MC2AC19 finds it imperative that people converse with them in Dutch:

*“But you can just talk Dutch to me or are you unable to with your ‘tata’”*.

There is a discriminatory implication here based on the use of ‘tata’, which is Dutch slang for ‘a white person’. This begs the question whether individuals find reasons to support a predisposed bias towards a certain type of person or behaviour. However, similarly to the Gaza dataset, being informed appears to be the most important metric for right of participation. UP3MC3AC4:

*“...check your facts before you make an invalid excuse for millions of deaths.”*

The response rejection can also be more implied than explicitly stated: UP9MC5AC16:

*“You can keep on motorcrossing boy, have a nice weekend”*.

This can clearly indicate that the person no longer wishes to converse any further, in a less definitive manner than

*“Your answer is so idiotic, that I don’t even take the effort! To discuss this with you”*  
– UP11MC2AC9.

Finally, the appeal to labelling is also mainly used to invalidate an individual’s opinion based on a given label. Comparably to the right to participation, this label can be given by anyone for a variety of reasons. For example, UP13MC1AC3 writes

*"It is like they don't read or listen at all but just want to be a victim. 😂".*

#### 4.2.2. *Ad hominem*

#### 4.2.2.1. Gaza

Ad hominem is a rhetorical fallacy used to disrupt a discussion by an attack on another participant of the discussion. This thesis adheres to the following definition by Merriam-Webster: “marked by or being an attack on an opponent's character rather than by an answer to the contentions made” (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

The ad hominem strategy can be employed based on any presumption or interpretation by the employer. However, the main reason found in the dataset that the tactic is employed is based on the support one expresses for either side of the conflict (i.e. Palestine and Israel respectively). For example, GP8MC1 shows clear support for Israel and includes a statement against Hamas/terrorism:

*"say NO to terrorism".*

Such a clear stance invites diametrically opposed individuals to express this opposition by dismissing the pro-Israel stance. GP8MC1AC1 explicitly states -in contrast to the main comment- that they see Israel and its supporters as the terrorists:

*“supporting Israel asks for terrorism. I think you are on the wrong side of the counter. Do something about your ignorance”.*

The majority of the comments in this thread are replies to the main comment (GP8MC1), which would indicate a strong displeasure with the support for Israel; there also appears to be a clash between religions as GP8MC1AC3 replies to MC1 with

*“...Thereby there is ONLY support on the new testament for israel, but that is added by Zionists them selves. Your belief your own book is corrupt”. However, not all replies to GP8MC1 are as in-depth as GP8MC1AC3. This is illustrated by GP8MC1AC4: “idiot” and GP8MC1AC6 “CORRECT HOWEVER YOU HAVE THE WRONG FLAG pspspspspSAY NO TO terrorism”.*

The main commenter MC1 also replies back to certain additional comments in defence of Israel, by supporting the position of Israel and discrediting the Palestine claim:



*“you attacked the strong country, in hope that your arab countries will help you. but unfortunately, nothing works still. unfortunately peanut butter 😊”*

(unfortunately peanut butter is a Dutch saying meaning unfortunately, but more light-hearted. It is used mockingly here). The whole discussion is quite bipartisan, with MC1 immovably expressing support for the Israeli side, and multiple AC's refuting this support and/or expressing their own support for the opposing side, Palestine, with some of the AC's commenting very strong argumenta ad hominem. E.g. GP8MC1AC11:

*“YOU ARE THE ANTI-CHRIST. The words you speak are pure enemy of God. And luckily your fate is not in my hands but those of God”.*

GP8MC1AC11's statement is a clear attack on MC1's persona by declaring him as a devil-like person through an accusation of being the 'anti-christ'. Additionally, there is a threat expressed here by the AC, stating that MC1 is lucky that the AC is not responsible for MC1's fate, implying that if that were the case, it would not end well for MC1. This discussion thread illustrates that a discussion can turn sour, or even hateful when ad hominem tactics are employed.

#### 4.2.2.2. Ukraine

Interestingly, there is overlap in the discussion of the conflicts of Gaza and Ukraine in the respective posts addressing them. For example, UP10MC5 starts off with the statement

*“Dutch people defending Ukraine 🤡”.*

The clown emoji is intended to mock the Dutch people that defend Ukraine. This stance may be due to the subject of the post itself, which discusses potential acts of racism against foreign students on the borders of Ukraine. The racism theme dictates the nature of the MC5 thread. UP10MC5AC2 responds to MC5 with the same rhetoric style:

*“people that support regimes in the middle-east that stone people because they are gay 🤡”.*

There is an apparent assumption that UPMC5 is in support of Middle-Eastern regimes, which could be based on aspects from MC5's other online expressions as this support is unclear from their initial comment. The ad hominem attack by UP10MC5AC2 continues to

shape the rest of the thread. The following comments are void of any responses to contentions, but instead are direct attacks. UP10MC5AC3 is the same account as UP10MC5, and they respond to AC2 with an attack of unwarranted sexual implication towards AC2's family:

*“send me your mother or sister and then you'll get confirmation if I am gay or not”.*

Interestingly, UP10MC5AC4 has not participated in the discussion before, but joins in and comments on UP10MC5AC3 with:

*“in stead of his mother or sister. Let us first step-by-step start with sending a goat or donkey your way”.*

There is a sexual stereotype connected to Arab people (they have sexual intercourse with goats/sheep/donkeys), which is used here by UP10MC5AC4 in defence of UP10MC5AC2, without prior provocation. The first ad hominem in the thread is apparently met by commenters with the same energy so that a process of mirroring the individual attacks is instigated. The use of ad hominem as a rhetoric strategy therefore seems to be contentious and opposed to constructive discussions between individuals.

#### 4.2.3. Privilege

##### 4.2.3.1. Gaza

Whereas gatekeeping and ad hominem are represented as more overt and easy to distinguish in the dataset, privilege appears more covert. There is little explicit mention of privilege in the comments. The only mention of the word privilege in the Gaza dataset comes from GP12MC4AC24:

*“no. They contribute to a hugely wrong framing that 1: Puts Palestinians in the wrong light and not as victims of a 75 year old apartheid and genocide. And 2: this framing will lead to an advance of islamophobia a la early 2000's so no we will not cool off. Must be nice that you are not on the receiving end of that islamophobia like us, oh the privilege...”.*

GP12MC4AC24 responds to GP12MC4 itself, who has not said anything about Islam, Muslims, Arabs or islamophobia. GP12MC4 simply states the following:

*“Can the people that are yelling to the NOS maybe cool off? You act like the NOS is enemy of the state numero uno. What is happening over there is horrible, apart from who is the perpetrator according to you (I defend neither Israel, nor the Palestinians). Aim your anger at the perpetrators, not at a news organisation...”*

Even though GP12MC4AC24 accuses GP12MC4 of having privilege, there is no indication of any privilege in their comment. The privilege in this comment therefore appears to come from a predisposition of GP12MC4AC24, who comments that they are themselves part of a group that contends -or has contended with- in the past- islamophobia. It could thus be interpreted that GP12MC4AC24 accuses GP12MC4 of an attack from a position of privilege, possibly out of fear of the islamophobia returning to -from their perspective- levels from the early 2000’s. However, to analyse GP12MC24’s comment, no attack seems to have taken place. Instead, they defend the news organisation from a place of ‘don’t shoot the messenger’, and propose to condemn the real perpetrators of violence in the conflict in the Gaza strip.

#### *4.2.3.2. Ukraine*

The first mention of the word privilege in the Ukraine dataset is below UP5. This post concerns reports of racism at the Ukrainian border. NOSStories explains in this video that among the refugees at the Polish border, the people of colour are rejected more than non-POC. The subject of the post itself contributes to the discussions in the comment section. For example, UP5MC4 writes

*“But, you should also mention that a lot of people are there illegally and therefore are not allowed to cross the border due to regulations. Yes, there are also students, and that is unfair, but the majority is not legally in Ukraine and buy fake documents that they make in Ukraine to cross the border. It is not as simple as Poland for example that does not allow them due to documentation and Ukraine has arranged that people with a ukr. Passport can come.”*

UP5MC4 expresses the assumption that the majority of the people that are rejected at the border were there illegally anyway. This assumption is later nuanced by UP5MC4 in their comment UP5MC4AC2, where they state that they don’t agree with these practices and just aim to put the situation in perspective. However, UP5MC4AC7 takes offense on UP5MC4, stating that:

*“...we are in a fuking war dimwit, legally or not. You are explaining with fuking privilege why these racists push back refugees because they have different passports, disgusting human 🤢🤢.”.*

The commenter appears to find any defence of the rejection at the border inexcusable, and has determined the border patrol to be racist regardless of the legality of the travel documents. They seemingly find it to be a privilege to not have to worry about documentation being accepted or rejected, and heavily judge UP5MC4 for expressing their opinion on the matter.

### **4.3. Inclusivity**

#### *4.3.1. In/outgroup*

In order to understand how the concept of in/outgroup appears in the datasets, it is important to determine what is meant by in/outgroup. It is a concept coined by Tajfel (1970), and can be defined as follows: ‘Intergroup discrimination can be triggered by the mere fact that there is a division into groups’ (Tajfel, 1970). Within the dataset, a multitude of these groups and accompanying in/outgroup attitudes can be distinguished into the following categories: based on nationality; based on religion; based on side supported; and attitude against news organisation(s).

Firstly, the attitude based on nationality appears in both datasets. Within the Gaza dataset, a multitude of nationalities is discussed; most prominently, Palestinian, Israeli, and Dutch nationalities. Some commenters have a clear understanding of who ‘we/us, and they/them’ are supposed to be. The supposed outgroup is judged, and the ingroup is protected. For example, GP2MC5AC30 states:

*“they are protecting their land come on”,*

defending the Israeli side, seemingly supporting the notion that self-defence is appropriate. GP2MC5AC31 responds to this comment:

*“come on? Why are you dutch people so fking unjust. How is killing innocent civilians self defense? Bombing hospitals self defense? Are you joking with me??”.*

This comment indicates a couple of in/outgroup attitudes. Firstly, the commenter does not identify with being Dutch, although they write in Dutch and comment in the comment section of a post by a Dutch news organisation. They apparently consider themselves as part

of another subgroup, which identifies as non-Dutch, or at least the individual commenter does. Secondly, they attribute an attitude to the Dutch outgroup: being unjust. This attribution may be seen separate from this conflict, or directly connected to the perceived choice of sides in the conflict (i.e. the ‘other side’ as perceived by GP2MC5AC31).

While the intergroup attitude of ‘picking sides’ seems almost inherent to this discussion, there are also more nuanced stances. This is exemplified by UP2MC4AC4:

*“lots of Russians are 100% against this action and absolutely do not support Putin and his choices. Russians are also strongly affected by these sanctions and are at risk to lose a lot of money...”*

The second in/outgroup attitude that arises from the data is the ‘attitude based on religion’. This attitude appears to be nearly fully absent from the Ukraine dataset. However, since the conflict in Gaza appears to be perceived as a clash of religions as well as a clash of two military sides in addition to an apparent sense of ‘brotherhood’ within the Muslim community, an attitude based on religion arises more frequently in comments in the Gaza dataset. For example, GP7MC2AC5:

*“I am not saying that they are doing nothing wrong because both parties do wrong things in every war, but the problem is that Muslims are very antisemitic and don’t want to live in peace with them!”*

In this comment, the commenter appears to determine Muslims to be a large outgroup, simultaneously generalising the group and attributing antisemitism to it. Additionally, they name the antisemitism seemingly determined to be inherently part of being Muslim as the main problem of the conflict.

Thirdly, intergroup attitudes based on which side an ingroup or outgroup supports appears in both datasets. For the Gaza dataset, the following main groups are distinguished: the West/Palestine/Israel/Zion/Hamas/the Netherlands. The commenters appear to try to make sense of certain actions and motivations. For example, GP12MC2 states:

*“When Russia invaded Ukraine, the world was too small, but Israel now does exactly the same in Gaza and everyone looks away. Sick world.”*

This commenter draws a comparison between the two military conflicts, and accuses ‘everyone’ of looking away. In response, GP12MC2AC7 writes:

*“you forget that Hamas was democratically chosen by the Palestinians. The people wants, incl lots of Muslims worldwide, that the whole country incl Israel becomes an Islamic state. That is the definition of ”free Palestine”. This means eradicate jews.. but we never talk about that genocide.”.*

GP12MC2AC7 seemingly determines Palestinians, Hamas and Muslims as one group and attributes the same democratic principles of the Netherlands to Hamas and Palestinians. Additionally, the commenter implies a larger agenda for this group and condemns the side supporting Palestine. Within the same thread, GP12MC2AC8 responds to GP12MC2:

*“screw you man! The Palestinians are treated as animals by the Zionists for 75 years! This is not comparable to what is going on between Ukraine and Russia. Do your research first and come cry after 🤔🤔”.*

In this comment, the commenter clearly attributes ‘being the wrong side’ to Israel and Zionists, defending Palestinians. Both comments respond to GP12MC2, but the two comments are diametrically opposed one another regarding the side they defend.

Fourthly, news organisations and (mainstream) news media arise as a clear outgroup. Comments about the media as an outgroup are written every now and then. For example, GP8MC4AC15 writes:

*“They want to free their own country and protect their people. It is that simple. But yeah the hypocritical western media are not going to tell about 75 years colonisation.”.*

In this case, all western media are considered one group with a one-sided message going against the belief this commenter holds, seemingly also going against the side that the commenter supports. The most comments about the media as an outgroup, however, appear in response to posts by the account NOSStories, which is the account that posts the news items under which the comment sections are analysed. For example, in GP4MC1, NOSStories writes:

*“We get a lot of questions from you about why we don’t show certain shocking images. As journalists we make choices every day about what to show and what not to show. ... We only show this if it is essential to show it as an image. ...”.*

In this comment, NOSStories explains why they make certain choices regarding their news coverage. There are multiple examples in response to GP4MC1 showing that NOSStories is regarded as an outgroup, but this sentiment is best illustrated by GP4MC1AC16:

*“you make one-sided choices more often. One-sided news of importance for what YOU want people to see. But hey, people are used to that from the media. So just continue”.*

In this comment, the commenter employs an accusatory tone which appears to determine NOSStories as an outgroup that does not want to provide the audience with truthful news coverage. This notion is underlined by comments in the thread UP2MC3. In this case, UP2MC3AC4 writes:

*“... The east is always shown as bad anyways. In the media etc you will never find the actual cause. You have to look from a neutral side to understand this problem.”.*

This comment further illustrates a certain distrust against the ‘media’ as a homogeneous group that is not to be trusted.

#### *4.3.2. Societal marginalisation*

##### *4.3.2.1.*

Societal marginalisation is one aspect of inclusivity that appears to emerge from the datasets. The concept of societal marginalisation mainly shows through a certain choice of descriptive wording. For example, when discussing a comparison between WW2 and the situation in Palestine/Israel, GP1MC4AC27 writes:

*“2<sup>nd</sup> ww only lasted 5 years, the occupation of Palestine already 75 years. A cornered cat makes strange jumps”.*

The use of the word ‘occupation’ could indicate that the commenter finds it unjust for the Palestinians, which is underlined by their use of the Dutch saying ‘A cornered cat makes strange jumps’ (een kat in het nauw maakt rare sprongen), which could be best translated as ‘desperate needs lead to desperate deeds’. However, GP1MC5AC2 expresses a more explicit stance regarding the power difference between the Israeli and Palestinian sides:

*“Palestinian innocents and Israeli colonists. It is the israelis that send their children to the front of a colonial war, palestinians cannot even leave Gaza.”.*

This commenter states a clear distinction between the two sides of the conflict as they perceive it. On one hand, there is the weaker, innocent Palestinian side. On the other hand, there is the stronger, oppressive Israeli side. Although this portrayal is the prominent one that emerges from the Gaza dataset, some commenters also attempt to portray the Israeli side as the marginalised side, although met with stark disagreements from other commenters. For example, GP11MC2AC2 writes:

*“why will you innocent Israelite. Attacking at a festival. Karma”.*

GP11MC2AC2 uses the word ‘innocent’ to indicate that the people that attended the festival on October 7<sup>th</sup> had nothing to do with military actions against Palestine. While this may be considered a safe statement to make, the responses to this comment apparently conclude that any attempt to portray Israeli people as innocent is unjust. GP11MC2AC15 compares it to the Palestinian side:

*“What are Palestinian civilians then? What is their mistake that they are bombed with the hope of killing a few terrorists?”.*

This response shows that there is no justification for the Israeli reaction to the Hamas attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, as Palestinian civilians appear to be determined ‘more innocent’ by the commenter.

#### *4.3.2.2. Ukraine*

Similar sentiments are apparent in the comments about the conflict in Ukraine. However, the comments seem to be less dichotomous, and while the support for one side is mostly in favour of Ukraine, more commenters appear to be in support of Russia than in support of Israel when compared to the comments on the conflict in Gaza. UP6MC4AC22 summarizes the marginalisation and accompanying perception in the comments in support of Ukraine in one statement:

*“if Russia stops fighting there is no more war. If Ukraine stops fighting there is no more Ukraine.”.*

The comment by this commenter may indicate the support responses and why one side may be considered marginalised in a bipartisan conflict. Interestingly, seeing one side of conflict



as the marginalised apparently does not always justify all actions of that side. For example, when NOSStories posted about reports of racism at the border of Ukraine against people of colour (POC) who were among the refugees, UP10MC5 commented:

*“Dutch people that defend Ukraine 🤡”.*

The commenter uses a clown emoji to indicate that the statement is meant mockingly. Remarkably, this comment seemingly disregards the military conflict altogether, and judges the situation based on the notion that there are reports of racism, indicating a ‘new’ marginalised group (i.e. the victims of the racism), as the ‘most marginalised’ and thusly the most in need of support. They achieve this by condemning the party that shows unjust acts against this marginalisation; in this case, Ukraine.

#### *4.3.3. Respect for different opinions*

##### *4.3.3.1. Gaza*

Within the discussions that take place in the comment sections, the commenters with different opinions are not always in agreement with each other and subsequently do not accept a different opinion as valid. As discussed in previous sections, the bipartisan nature of the conflicts themselves prove to instigate a dichotomy in the attitudes and beliefs of the commenters. However, there are multiple examples of civil discussion between different commenters, mainly aiming for a rectification of- or addition to information expressed by another commenter. For example, GP9MC2 writes

*“Military targets??? Hospitals and apartment complexes. Fleeing people that supposedly had been given the time to travel to the south have been shot down.”*

This comment directly responds to information provided in the videopost by NOSStories, wherein they talk about the response of the Israeli army to the attack on October 7<sup>th</sup> by Hamas. Other comments attempt to nuance the situation, for example GP9MC2AC1:

*“If Hamas shoots commandoposts, weapon repositories, and access to bunkers and shoots rockets from hospitals and apartment complexes then Hamas is committing a war crime and that object has become a military target. Hamas hates Israel more than that it loves the Palestinian people.”*

This commenter attempts to explain why the military targets become military targets, even when they are hospitals or apartment complexes. There appears to be no judgment about

how informed GP9MC2 is, but rather an honest attempt at adding to their knowledge about the situation. GP9MC2 responds to this comment in GP9MC2AC4:

*“What are you rambling about? Always the same with the pro-israeli bots.... There is never been thrown bombs from hospitals on Israel, that is utter nonsense. All of it propaganda which already is being spewed out by many.”.*

The comment is less civil and more judgmental than the comment it responds to. However, this lack of intent regarding further discussion does not apprehend other commenters from an honest attempt at rectification of- or addition to their knowledge. Even NOSStories itself responds to GP9MC2 in GP9MC2AC5:

*“hi! We didn’t say ‘military targets’ but rather that the Israeli army attacks ‘targets’.”*

They attempt to rectify a clear misunderstanding based on the information in the video itself by reiterating the intended meaning.

#### *4.3.3.2. Ukraine*

UP12 regards a story about Ukrainian refugees and how they are accommodated in the Netherlands. This subject instigates strong opinions from the Dutch commenters. For example, UP12MC4 states:

*“nice that people also did this with Syrian refugees! ugh ugh...”.*

The commenter mockingly draws a comparison between Ukrainian refugees and Syrian refugees, and implies hypocrisy. UP12MC4AC1 replies to UPMC4 with the following question:

*“then where is your refugee?”.*

This comment is a direct provocation regarding the hypocritical nature of the MC. If an individual comments on hypocrisy, it appears to be imperative that they themselves are innocent of committing the same hypocrisy. The comment by UP12MC4AC1 is met with reason in the comment UP12MC4AC2, which is the same individual as UP12MC4. They reply:

*“not everyone has the space and/or the money. You have not seen me saying a-ny-where that I think everyone in the Netherlands should take a refugee into their home,*

*or did you? ;) it is about all these people who apparently have the space for Ukrainians but not for people from other warzones.”.*

The commenter here explains why they themselves may not be in a position to take in any refugees, and emphasises that they perceive the Ukrainian refugees as being more welcomed in the Netherlands. UP12MC4AC4 responds to this notion:

*“seems logical right?”*

This commenter, as seen in their previous remark, writes short, straight-to-the-point messages without expressing their own stance on the subject. They seem to actively attempting to engage in conversation with UP12MC4. The response from UP12MC4 is equally civil in tone:

*“and then I wonder where the same energy was with for example Syrian refugees who also live in a war and flee for their lives. I wonder why Ukrainians are worth more than Syrians”*

This commenter expresses concerns about the subject matter discussed in the post, and appears to remain civil in their responses to another commenter that disagrees with them. This type of civil discussion seemingly does not emerge a lot in the datasets, but appears to happen more often when the subject matter discussed does not concern the stance of one of the commenters, or is regarded separate from the larger discussion taking place in the public domain. E.g. UP11 discusses Ukrainian people’s pets being rescued. The comments on this post are significantly more civil, for example when UP11MC5 asks:

*“Is there a link or an action whereby we can help regarding the animals? I would like to dedicate myself to this and would like to know how/were one can help.”.*

The subsequent comments commit to providing more information and feedback to UP11MC5.

#### **4.4. Rationalism**

##### *4.4.1. Emotional response*

###### *4.4.1.1. Gaza*

One of the reasons that the individuals commenting on the post and/or other comments, could be that a military conflict inherently brings injustice e.g. due to the loss of human life. This injustice may instigate an emotional response. This injustice, however, is not always

linked directly to the injustices that one perceives from the conflict itself, but could be brought forth from injustices one perceives within a discussion on a public forum. These may manifest as other individuals being of different opinion, commenters writing hurtful statements through argumenta ad hominem aimed at other commenters in the comment section, or for example through hurtful comments towards the people directly impacted by the conflict. One of these examples can be seen in GP2MC1AC3:

*“You support terrorists, they should put you in tbs centre”.*

This commenter shows a direct disagreement with another commenter’s stance, and responds with a hurtful comment to harshly show their disagreement by stating that GP2MC1 is so mentally unwell that GP2MC1 should be locked away in a mental institution. It is unclear if this statement is an exaggeration, but the words themselves could be considered quite strong and oppositional to civil disagreement. This is unfortunate, because a comment such as GP2MC1AC3 allows for other commenters to behave in a similar way. This can be seen in GP2MC1AC6, who responds directly to GP2MC1AC3:

*“you support apartheid, they should put you in a prison without daylight”.*

This comment directly mirrors the comment it is responding to with the same rhetoric. These examples of strong emotional response could be considered justified, as it could reflect the emotion of the commenter. However, it fails in leaving room for others to discuss more in-depth what they are feeling so strongly about and therefore leaves the discussion falling flat between two ‘screaming’ sides. This is exemplified by the lack of further response from either GP2MC1AC3 and GP2MC1AC6, as there are no more comments after the latter’s.

Other types of comments that show equally strong wording and lack of depth are the statements aimed directly against the side opposed to the side an individual supports. For example, GP9MC1 is a comment by NOSStories stating that they receive questions about why they choose to show certain images and videos, while choosing to not show other images and videos. The response from GP9MC1AC4 is as follows:

*“go lick israel’s butt more with j Rutte with it! ! Lots of shame on you!!!”.*

This commenter strongly expresses a certain kind of disgust that arises from how they perceive NOSStories to show the Gaza conflict. It appears that they think it is one-sided, supporting the ‘wrong’ side. Therefore, they should be very ashamed of themselves.

#### 4.4.1.2. Ukraine

The comments used as examples from the Gaza dataset are not the only types of emotional responses that can be found in both datasets, although they appear to be the most prevalent. An example where individuals use strong wording while also engaging in joint meaning making and more civil discussion is the following discussion between two commenters starting with UP13MC1AC25:

*“Why can’t you engage in normal conversation without offending? 🤔”*

This is an interesting comment as it directly addresses that another commenter is using harsh, emotionally charged wording. The other commenter is consequently called out on it by UP13MC1AC25. UP13MC1AC26 responds, again by mirroring, with the following comment:

*“Why can’t you read my source and respond to that instead of only reading the last word? 😏”.*

The use of mirroring between commenters appears to happen often and could be attributed to the social contract that is established between the two individuals engaged in discussion. However, as seen with the example from the Gaza dataset (i.e. GP2MC1AC6 and GP2MC1AC3), it may depend on which words are used as that discussion stopped, while UP13MC1AC27 writes a comment in response to UP13MC1AC26:

*“You responded 1 minute ago, can I take some time to read and do my research? Thanks”.*

The commenter, while seemingly maintaining distance from the individual they respond to, responds more moderately after being asked to discuss the source instead of the comment.

While the majority of the emotional responses in the dataset are represented through an angry tone, there are some comments that appear to be more positive. For example, UP12MC5 writes:

*“I find this a beautiful initiative, it is just painful to see that this only happens with refugees from Ukraine.”.*

This comment is a response to the UP12, in which is discussed how the Netherlands takes in refugees from Ukraine. UP12MC5 shows a duality in emotional response as it appears they feel the same for all refugees, and not only the ones from Ukraine. The positive emotional response in the first half of the comment seems to lose some of that positivity by the second half of the comment as if it is still not enough. The negatively charged latter half of the comment instigates more response than the positive former half, as exemplified by UP12MC5AC2:

*“Exactly, gross”.*

This commenter only responds to UP12MC5’s statement that “..., it is just painful to see that this only happens with refugees from Ukraine.”. This could indicate a preference from commenters responding to negative comments rather than positive ones, or that individuals feeling negatively about something they come across in the post or comment section are more likely to respond.

#### *4.4.2. Source naming / stating facts*

##### *4.4.2.1. Gaza*

While many posts and comments do not go in-depth about certain topics that are discussed, and especially lack the need for the naming of sources, as exemplified in previous segments, there are some individuals in the comments that attempt to share where they found their information from. For example, GP1MC5AC3 states in response to a deleted comment:

*“between 2008 and now Palestinians murdered 23 israeli children, against the 1437 palestinian children murdered by israeli’s. source:  
<https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>”.*

It is unfortunate that the interaction with the deleted comment cannot be illustrated here, but it is insightful that even on the first day of the conflict (i.e. October 7<sup>th</sup>), some commenters resort to finding credible sources such as the reporting from the United Nations that is named as the source of information by this commenter. Interestingly, while GP1MC5AC3 responds to a deleted comment, the account that had the deleted comment responds in GP1MC5AC5:

*“the land belonged to the jews for hundreds of years. They are just taking their land back.”.*

The commenter apparently chooses to disregard the source naming, and seemingly merely expresses their perception of justification for the actions of Israel within the conflict. This justification appears to be regarded as common knowledge as well as true. For example, GP2MC4AC6 writes something similar:

*“2000 years ago it was already Israeli territory”.*

This is one of the justifications that appear in the comments, supposedly from individuals that support Israel. However, GP2MC5AC11, assumed to be a supporter of the Palestinian side states the following as equal justification to the one exemplified by GP1MC5AC5 and GP2MC4AC6:

*“but you all funnily enough support Ukraine? Palestinians are already being suppressed for 75 years in their OWN country. My grandma is older than that Israel exists, please dive into the history.”.*

Both justifications could be seen as equally legitimate, but depending on the side one supports, one seems to hold more value than the other.

Another way of sharing sources comes from within the platform Instagram. For example, GP6MC2AC13 writes:

*“just look on @eye\_of\_palestine\_mister. But for these whole 7 days huh. Be honest”.*

The commenter shares another account as being a legitimate source of information, which could very well be the case. However, GP6MC2AC14 thinks differently:

*“well on that account there is exactly nothing useful to see that could provide in-depth information on this situation”.*

This is interesting, as it is unclear why GP6MC2AC14 disregards the account as being not useful regarding the situation. This illustrates a clash of sources and also a clash of perception because one party finds this account useful enough to share as a legitimate source, while the other party wholly disregards the account.

#### 4.4.2.2. Ukraine

While the dataset on Ukraine does not provide as much explicit source naming as the Gaza dataset, the legitimacy of sources is often discussed. For example, UP7MC1AC6 writes the following about Russian TV:

*“you don’t mean this right? You say Russian tv is a trustworthy source? Whatever, I indeed lost this wager, I have seen your account, that’s a basket case 😂”.*

This commenter seems to have decided that Russian television is an untrustworthy source. However, they not only state this as their belief, they link it to the account they are responding to, stating that that particular account is a ‘basket case’, supposedly meaning that the posts on that account are also not trustworthy and consequently delegitimizing their statements. Unfortunately, this account’s comment was deleted so what is responded to cannot be seen. It seemed to have sparked multiple others to question the statement, and some of it can be traced through a comment by UP7MC1AC7:

*“omg, really, you say a piece of Putin’s speech is a trustworthy source? 😂😂 Three newssites in Russia have been shut down today only because they tell things that the government does not want to hear, and you sit in the mediastream 😂 You watched Russia Today or what?”*

Furthermore, trusting certain sources seems to be linked to defending these sources as either legitimate, trustworthy, or ‘the truth’. One interaction between two commenters illustrates the tug of war that seems to happen when two individuals do not agree a source of information as truthful. Initially, UP10MC1 Writes:

*“... I love everyone but I also realise very well that this is brought up extra in the news to divide. Divide man unfortunately. I follow some famous Youtubers of which one lives in Ukraine and interviews ‘darker’ people who tell a whole different story....”.*

Two statements in this comment jump out. Firstly, the commenter seemingly believes that ‘the news’ aims to create division between people. Secondly, one of his sources apparently lives in Ukraine and the commenter consequently implies that what this Youtuber shows must be true, as they are actually there. UP10MC1AC1 replies to this comment:



*“fuck off with your division of people. Just because you hear a counter-narrative does not mean that their story is not true. Very serious what is happening there but Ukraine is one of the most racist countries and that shows now again.”*

UP10MC1AC1 goes against what he perceives is stated by UP10MC1, but in reality it seems that they agree with each other, which is corroborated by them in UP10MC1AC2:

*“Yes indeed you should read better what I type :)”*

It seems like a current belief about what is ‘true’ and a stance that should be defended can be more important than what is actually responded to. UP10MC1AC1 seems to have decided what information they agree with or find truthful, and appears to be more concerned with defending it than checking to see whether what they responded to aligns with this predisposition.

#### *4.4.3. Rationalism – Appeal to logic*

##### *4.4.3.1. Gaza*

Considering providing sources as a significant part of the theme ‘stating facts’, an appeal to logic manifests more subliminally. The appeals to logic can be regarded as being perceived as ‘makes sense’. However, from the Gaza dataset, there appears to be a degree to this notion. Some individuals express more extreme claims as logical, while others express less extreme claims or even go against appeals to logic. For example, in GP5, the subject of the post is Israel calling in reservists. A Dutch/Jewish boy is interviewed about being called upon by Israel to travel to Israel as an army reservist and he explains what it means for him from his perspective as an individual with Jewish heritage. GP5MC1 appears to find difficulty seeing the logic in his actions. They write:

*“”My grandparents are Holocaust survivors” and now you go help another people’s genocide?”*

This commenter expresses that they find the boy’s actions illogical and is supported by GP5MC1AC1:

*“exactly, I don’t understand how people can justify this”*

Interestingly, while GP5MC1AC1 finds logic in GP5MC1’s statement, it instigates a back-and-forth between what does and does not make sense. For example, GP5MC1AC2 responds as follows:

*“do you even know what genocide means? There is no talk of genocide here, Israel just defends itself and strikes back hard”.*

This commenter does not directly reply to the part of GP5 that does not make sense to GP5MC1, but replies to them about something that does not make sense; in this case the use of the word ‘genocide’. Following GP5MC1AC2’s comment, GP5MC1AC3 responds to GP5MC1AC2’s comment’s part about “...Israel just defends itself...”, which seems to not make sense to them. They state: “And Palestine does this for 80 years already since England dropped Israeli’s (Eastern European Jews) there because it supposedly is their promised land. Many Jews are against the Zionistic regime of Israel.”. These interactions are exemplary for the appeal to logic that is expressed, and how others respond to select parts of a comment; namely the parts that disagrees with their logic of the situation. The statement does not make sense to them. However, this does result in multiple commenters not fully responding to one another, seemingly leading to a fragmented discussion.

#### *4.4.3.2. Ukraine*

Another form of the appeal to logic can be also found in the Ukraine dataset. This is an ‘if...then’ construction. For example, UP3MC2 writes:

*“Good example of what happens if you have loyalty for the NATO. They will send you thoughts and prayers and not defend you. All these oligarchs have double nationalities here in Europe and the US. They have the real power and are spared from the sanctions.”.*

This commenter uses the ‘if...then’ construction to signify a logical sequence of events. They state that it is illogical to have loyalty to the NATO, because as they explain, there is nothing to be gained from being loyal. This claim is immediately contested, as UP3MC2AC1 writes:

*“NATO sends money, materials, weapons and intelligence. If we would actually send troops it becomes a nuclear war, and that is not better for anyone”.*

As seen in other examples, the response from UP3MC2AC1 shows mirroring of a rhetorical construction initiated by the commenter that is being responded to. In this case, UP3MC2 employs ‘if...then’ by stating that if there is loyalty to NATO, then they will only send thoughts and prayers. UP3MC2AC1 uses the same construction: if the NATO sends troops, then there will be nuclear war. While it is difficult to discern if there is impact from the

mirroring on the discussion, these two accounts continue to discuss the conflict by employing certain forms of appeal to logic. For example, in UP3MC2AC3 (i.e. the same account as UP3MC2), the commenter writes:

*“at the same time Putin has talks with Pakistan to form a coalition. And we all know which radical government finances Pakistan un-officially.”.*

Within this comment, the appeal to logic is the rhetorical fallacy argument of popularity through the use of ‘we all know’. The information they provide is logically known to all, while the claim is unsupported by any sources written by the commenter. Interestingly, further into the discussion, both parties start to disclose their sources, potentially indicating that appeals to logic are ending in effectiveness or usefulness. A similar event occurs in the thread UP7MC1, wherein UP7MC1AC3 and UP7MC1AC4 (same account) uses arguments of expertise as an appeal to logic by disclosing that they wrote their comment from Russia.

UP7MC1AC3: *“did you know that this is complete bsht? There was no one at the border of Russia. That is what they want to make us believe in order for this dictator to do as he pleases”.*

UP7MC1AC4: *“I write this from Russia.”.*

Unfortunately they respond to an account from whom the comments are deleted, but the same account that wrote UP7MC1AC4 writes some comments refuting the source brought up by ‘Comments Deleted’, which shows a similar pattern of appeal to logic as UP3MC2.

## **4.5. Agreement**

### *4.5.1. Accept / reject new information*

#### *4.5.1.1. Gaza*

The aim of agreement is to find common ground partly through willingness to revise and change opinions in light of new information. While previous sections have mostly demonstrated an unwillingness to find common ground (e.g. ad hominem, respect for different opinions), there are plenty examples of commenters aiming to find common ground through sharing new information. One example of this is an interaction that takes place in GP12, which discusses an attack on a hospital in Gaza. GP12MC1 writes:

*“Thereby is already long known that it was Israel that did this. Therefore it makes no sense to give their denial a podium...”.*

This commenter expresses that they have a clear perception of which party is responsible and subsequently criticizes NOSStories for giving Israel's denial of the attack attention in the post. Commenter GP12MC1AC4 is not so sure about this, and asks the following:

*“Do you have a source for this, the confession or the proof? I read Al Jazeera and they did not dare to pass judgment. Just a suspicion expressed by Imran Khan.”.*

This commenter attempts to find further understanding of the situation by showing willingness to listen to new information. Another commenter, GP12MC1AC6, replies to them:

*“The representative of the Israeli president has confirmed the attack on Twitter. Not much later this tweet was deleted by them. If you search on Google, you will find it quickly. Alternative @cestmocro has also posted it!”*

This commenter reacts to the request for more information and acquiesces to it by providing the information they found. GP12MC1AC4 comments in reaction to this new information in comment GP12MC1AC7:

*“Thank you, can't find it on his account. But it is nice to hear more sides of the story.”.*

This three-comment interaction can be considered as a civil conversation. One party asks for more information, another provides it, after which they express their gratitude for sharing the new information and are left for themselves to accept it or reject it.

#### *4.5.1.2. Ukraine*

Although it is sometimes possible to have civil discussions centred around the exchange of information and finding common ground, there are also multiple situations where no agreement can be found and where the commenters appear to actively engage in discussions where common ground can only be found if the one commenter fully agrees with the other commenter. For example, UP13MC4 writes:

*“I think this is so regrettable that it is about such large sums with Ukraine and people don't seem to know about the situation in yemen or Palestine. What is the difference between these countries? Yes the position but is that the only reason to not take them seriously and that people there are allowed to be murdered?????”.*

Interestingly, this commenter compares multiple conflicts based on their perception of the principle of violent injustice toward people in different countries with different situations. While UP13MC4AC4 writes an extensive answer to this question, it appears to have no impact on UP13MC4, as they never respond to them. They do however engage in incivil discussion with UP13MC4AC6. This commenter writes:

*“It is the Palestinians who have declared war on Israel already two times to take over Israeli territory.. They lost those wars and reject all peace negotiations because they want everything. Not what the UN has allocated. The Palestinians are making sure themselves that they are in this situation.”.*

This commenter provides UP13MC4 with contradictory information. They, however, respond with the following message in comment UP13MC4AC10:

*“ “not what the UN has allocated” bro you cannot accept reality. Why do you think that there was a war in the first place?? Because Israel is there illegally. You are all hypocrites. Especially joe Biden with “who does Putin think he is that he can put and recognise a republic””.*

An interesting remark from this commenter is that they not only reject UP13MC4AC6's attempt to provide new information, they do so by saying that UP13MC4AC6 'cannot accept reality'. They seem to reject the new information by simply denying its existence.

#### *4.5.2. Attempt to diffuse conflict*

##### *4.5.2.1. Gaza*

While finding common ground through coming to an understanding about the information that one accepts as perceived true or untrue may be one way, another way is to attempt to diffuse the tension in any discussion or conflict that may occur in the comment section. For example, in the comment section of GP12, there are many comments expressing antipathy towards the NOS and NOSStories. Commenter GP12MC4 appears to attempt to diffuse that antipathy by writing:

*“Can the people that are yelling to the NOS maybe cool off? You act like the NOS is enemy of the state numero uno. What is happening over there is horrible, apart from who is the perpetrator according to you (I defend neither Israel, nor the Palestinians). Aim your anger at the perpetrators, not at a news organisation...”.*

While this commenter does not deny other commenters their feelings, they seem to attempt to find common ground in redirecting these emotions to the party that deserves the anger from their perspective. Additionally, they mention that regardless of the sides in the conflict, the situation itself is terrible. This could be seen as another attempt at diffusing conflict within the comment sections regarding the choice of sides and consequent lack of common ground. In reaction to GP12MC4, multiple commenters show another form of common ground: an enemy in common. As illustrated in other examples, this common enemy is embodied by either one of the sides (i.e. Palestine and Israel). However, here it seems to be embodied by NOSStories, as can be exemplified by GP12MC4AC16:

*“@nosstories is from now on also our archnemesis!!!! They need to learn to send news!”. Commenter GP12MC4AC20 corroborates this idea of NOSStories as a common enemy. They write: “one can be angry about false reporting.”.*

Unfortunately, finding another common enemy in order to achieve common ground does not help with diffusing conflict, it appears to merely momentarily redirect the emotion -in these cases anger-. This notion is called out by commenter GP12MC4AC13, who writes:

*“Typical how a number of commenters on your pleasant comment immediately present themselves here non-independent. Including curse words and aggression, and ad hominem attacks on a free person. Hopefully Insta investigates these attacks and silences these persons immediately, because I am actually ready for opinions that are open to decent research. Even in these dark days.”.*

This commenter seems to not actively attempt to diffuse the conflict in order to find common ground, but does call out the redirection of anger and expresses regret about the practices of verbal violence and aggression, seemingly implying them unproductive to civil discussion.

#### 4.5.2.2. Ukraine

As opposed to the Gaza dataset, the Ukrainian dataset contains more examples of non-satirical humour as a means to find common ground. Assumedly under the notion ‘laughter makes light’, commenters engage in humorous threads. For example, UP4MC6 writes:

*“Can you imagine that this would happen in NL? Rutte with an MP5 in a trench with Urkers 🤪”.*

The responses from UP4MC6AC1-UP4MC6AC4 are as follows:

*“Omg 🤔👉”;*

*“HAHAHAHAHAH”;*

*“On his bike?”;*

*“They will flee man”.*

UP4MC6, writes an impossible scenario could be visualised by other commenters as a humorous situation, which seems to be the case based on the reactions.

As anger can be redirected towards a common enemy, pathos can be redirected towards a common friend. For example, UP11 discusses attempts to reunite Ukrainian people with their pets through rescue missions. A positive emotion toward a pet is something many commenters appear to empathise with as is illustrated by UP11MC5:

*“Is there a link or an action whereby we can help regarding the animals? I would like to dedicate myself to this and would like to know how/were one can help.”.*

What stands out in this comment is the use of the word ‘we’, as it implies a perceived predisposition from UP11MC5 that there is an established common ground between them and others that are willing to contribute to the rescue missions. This common ground is somewhat confirmed by the response from UP11MC5AC1:

*“@animalinneed and @ifawnl ❤️”.*

This commenter heeds the request from UP11MC5, to which UP11MC5 replies:

*“thanks! I already googled a little bit and saw that almost all animal organisations join hands tomorrow and start a conjoint nr and line for help.”.*

Common ground appears to be found by denying any negative emotions and redirecting positive emotions to help those in need.

#### 4.5.3. Asking a question

##### 4.5.3.1. Gaza

Asking a question can have multiple purposes. In the first place the purpose appears to be genuine: asking out of curiosity for new information or an elaboration on an existing statement that is not fully understood. This happens for example In response to GP3MC2AC3, who writes the following statement:

*“millions of deads 😞”.*

GP3MC2AC4 reacts with the question:

*“where do you get these millions from? The maximum amount victims that I could find lied around the 10.000 but that was from 2021. Does not diminish the fact that every death is horrible.”.*

The commenter seems to be confused by the statement made by GP3MC2AC3, as it does not align with their previous knowledge; rather it lies quite far from a statistic they have remembered. They therefore ask GP3MC2AC3 for clarification of this statistic.

GP3MC2AC3 responds to this question in GP3MC2AC5:

*“my apologies, I hereby correct myself”.*

In this comment they show acknowledgement that their initial statement may be wrong, potentially instigated by GP3MC2AC4's request for clarification. GP3MC2AC4 subsequently responds:

*“oh yea it was no hate, I was just genuinely curious where you get the numbers from.”.*

This interaction shows a civil interaction between a provider of information and a recipient of information, of which the latter shows genuine curiosity into the source of the information of the provider through asking them a question.

However, not all questions are genuine requests for information. Another form that it can take is that of reconsideration. This can be found in GP8MC5AC15:



*“are you comparing the holocaust to the Palestinian question? Of course what happens in Palestine is, just like the holocaust, inhumane. But to compare that jews were oppressed nearly 10 years and compare in 4 years 6 million deaths.”*

The purpose of this question seems to not be an answer from the commenter the question is asked to, but to urge them to ask the question to themselves. It could almost be replaced with the question ‘Are you sure you want to say/write that?’. GP8MC5AC15 already appears to know what their own opinion is about the situation, but wants the GP8MC5 (i.e. the commenter responded to) to reconsider their statement:

*“Genocide Holocaust 2023 on the Palestinians who doesn’t get it already is really stupid and wants to accept everything zionists do. NEVER BEEN A CONFLICT LIKE THEY TRY TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE IT IS BEEN A PLAN ALREADY ALWAYS!”.*

This comment appears quite expressive, which in part may be why GP8MC5AC15 urges GP8MC5 to think if they ‘are sure they want to say/write this’.

#### *4.5.3.2. Ukraine*

Sometimes the purpose of asking a question appears to be leaving the question unanswered. This happens through the form of a rhetorical question, wherein the answer is supposedly known merely by reading the question. It is a form of cynical humour used to go against another person or a statement made by that person within the comment section specifically. For example, UP9MC5 writes:

*“Propaganda, russia has taken over the building and nothing is broken”.*

This is a statement made by a commenter expressing what they perceive to be what transpired in the situation described in UP9. Commenter UP9MC5AC1 asks them a rhetorical question:

*“yes those flying bullets and bombs and fire are all fake on the live cameras ? 🤔”.*

Firstly, UP9MC5AC1 noticeably uses an emoji to express an emotion they feel or they themselves about the comment written by UP9MC5, or they want the potential readers of the response to feel as a sort of emotional guideline to their own comment. The rhetorical question appears to be used mockingly here to indicate a certain ridicule with UP9MC5’s

comment, with the consequently inevitable answer to the question being ‘no, they are not fake’.

The use of the rhetorical question appears to also be used slightly differently. While the manner of use in the previous example leaves little room for the other commenter to go into more civil or informed discussion, the example of UP12MC4AC10 seems a bit more nuanced:

*“bro did you pay attention? Countries like Germany, England, Belgium and Austria received and receive tremendously many Syrian refugees hahah”.*

The rhetorical question in this case is *“bro did you pay attention?...”*. The supposed answer to this question remains ‘no’, but the commenter gives an opportunity to -in contrast to the question itself- pay attention this time by providing information in the rest of the comment after the rhetorical question. It could be interpreted as ‘you did not pay attention before, but I give you the opportunity to do so now’.

## 5. Conclusion

With 52% of Dutch citizens using social media as their main source of news reporting, this thesis is concerned with discovering how they respond to the news on one social media platform, Instagram. For this thesis, two news cases were selected: The ongoing military conflicts in Gaza, and Ukraine. The Instagram account NOSStories was chosen as the account from which the posts would be selected, as they are a subsidiary outlet of the most well-known public news organisation in the Netherlands, the NOS. For both cases, the first fourteen days since the respective inciting incidents were chosen as this is a period in which news can be confounding and scarce. From each day, one post was selected for an aggregate of 28 posts for both cases respectively, meaning 14 posts per case. A thematic analysis was performed on the comments in order to identify key themes. The aim of this thesis is to answer the following question: *“How does NOSStories and its audience interact between- and among each other, from the perspective of participatory journalism in posts about the ongoing Ukraine-Russia- and the Israel-Hamas conflict within the first two weeks after the respective inciting incidents.”*

### 5.1. Sub-question 1

Regarding the question: *How do the interactions between audiences themselves, and audience and the journalists representing the account NOSStories take place in the context of participatory journalism?*, there were multiple significant results that emerged from the analysis. Firstly, from the perspective of the news outlet – audience relationship, there were only a handful of occasions where NOSStories initiated interaction through a comment of their own, and only one occasion in which NOSStories responded to a comment. The main reasons for this interaction from the perspective of NOSStories were rectifications, one addition, and clarifications of choices that they made, which indicates that they do read the comments and choose to respond if they see many similar comments, as can be seen in the result section **Inclusivity – in/outgroup**, but abstain from having actual interactions with commenters.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that NOSStories maintains a certain distance to the audience, and only attempts to gap that distance when they absolutely must. However, they refrain from further engaging after the clarification.

Secondly, the interactions between audience members were naturally more plentiful and formed the main body of the datasets. From a perspective of participatory journalism, the discussions that took place within the comment sections were very diverse. One factor,

however, was the prevalence of mirroring of tone that appeared to shape the interactions that took place. This notion of mirroring could shape the interaction as a whole, between all additional comments (AC's), or only part of the interaction, within one conversation that happened (e.g. AC1 + AC3). The nature of these discussions in light of participatory journalism were mainly negatively loaded. Based on this, one could deduce that most commenters responded angrily or frustrated. At the same time, about half of all comments would actively engage in acts of participatory journalism through sharing sources (**Rationalism – source naming / stating facts**), expressing rectifications to statements from others (**Rationalism – source naming / stating facts & appeal to logic; Agreement – all sections**), and active engagement with meaning making in light of the information and discussions that emerged within the comment section.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the interactions between audience members are highly salient regarding the presence of acts of participatory journalism. Audience members did not shy away from discussing difficult topics inherently linked to the respective cases. However, based on the conclusions above, the overall negative tone in all comment sections of all posts could limit or even deter more people from being engaged in interactions.

## 5.2. Sub-question 2:

Regarding the question: *What is the role of framing within the posts themselves and the accompanying comment section?*, there were multiple significant results that emerged from the results. Firstly, there were multiple commenters that engaged in expressing a need for rectification from NOSStories, stating that they disagreed with either the post itself or part of the post regarding the wording or choice of images. NOSStories explained their choice of image or wording only twice in a main comment (MC), as can be seen in result section **Inclusivity – in/outgroup**. Interestingly, these disagreements were very frequently accusatory in tone. Audience members accused NOSStories of propaganda, framing, obscuring facts, choosing sides, lying, and intentionally not choosing to show 'the truth' of what was happening in the situations the news posts were about. These accusations heavily accumulated in the AC's of MC's commented by NOSStories. Examples of these accusations can be found in the result section **Inclusivity – In/outgroup**.

Additionally, audience members showed similar behaviour when discussing framing among each other. An example of this can be found in **Universalism – Privilege**. A significant theme that emerged from the results was that framing was almost exclusively

identified by commenters expressing an opposing opinion to the comment in which the framing was identified. This ties in heavily with the aspect of a necessity of ‘choosing sides’ in the respective conflicts.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that audience members appear to find framing from NOSSstories an issue. There were multiple occasions where an audience member commented on practices in either the news post or comment from NOSSstories, identifying a perceived act of framing and subsequently -in varying forms- expressed disagreement with the framing. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the framing is inherently tied in with a difference in stance and opinion. The framing was never identified or called out between commenters that agreed with each other, and exclusively emerged from discussions in which commenters held opposing views on the subject of the discussion. This means that framing is a means to an end for a commenter to express an opposing view.

### **5.3. Sub-question 3:**

Regarding the question: *What are the differences between the posts and the accompanying comment sections of the posts about the respective conflicts?*, the results showed a minor difference between the posts and the accompanying comment sections from the respective cases. The first significant difference regarded the amount of commenters. The posts concerning the Gaza conflict contained significantly more comments than the posts about the Ukraine conflict; this includes MC’s and AC’s. Secondly, the tone that was maintained in the comments about the Ukraine conflict was less extreme and negative. While no humour was found in the Gaza dataset, apart from cynical/satirical comments mocking another commenter, there were a couple of examples in the Ukraine dataset that were humorous in nature. An example can be found in the result section **Agreement – Attempting to diffuse conflict**.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the type of interactions were not different between the two datasets as all dimensions discussed in the results were present in both datasets. However, there were much less comments and interactions in the Ukraine dataset overall. Furthermore, one type of interaction that was present in the Ukraine dataset and absent in the Gaza dataset was the presence of humorous comments. Both of these conclusions are interesting as they may entail that the social reality for the commenters differs between the two military conflicts, even though the types of interactions were similar in nature.

#### **5.4. Sub-question 4:**

Regarding the question: *What are the observable manners in which NOSStories utilizes the technological possibilities of Instagram in regards to the stage three interactivity of participatory journalism?*, the results were quite significant. NOSStories was very absent from nearly all comment sections. They posted an MC six times in the twenty-eight posts that were analysed, and there was only one instance of an AC by NOSStories. Furthermore, the instance that they commented an MC, the comment itself proved to be either more of a public service announcement or a passive gathering of audiences comments, without any subsequent interactions in the AC section of their own MC's.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that NOSStories generally seems to show little interest in engaging with its audience and thus seldomly intends to perform acts of participatory journalism within the two datasets analysed.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1. Findings**

One of the most important findings of this thesis regards the way the concept of participatory journalism, especially stage three as described by Engelke (2019, p.33), appears in an online social media platform. Engelke (2019, p.33) explains that stage three of participatory journalism is the stage wherein the audience has the most agency over the news content. The conclusions in this thesis, however, indicate that the use of the word ‘audience’ is too limited. The online space of an individual should be regarded as a unique digital profile of information input, from which an individual creates an understanding of the (online) world. Especially in the context of news consumption, the ‘audience’ is merely a momentary overlap of individual profiles. Of course, a higher visibility of specific pieces of online content and a consequent higher exposure and consumption could result in an overlap between a larger number of profiles. Online spaces allow for a higher enforce rate of this overlap with information and other profiles that already fit one’s own. This is described in Cinelli et al. (2021, p.1-2) through the concept of ‘echo chambers’. However, while these echo chambers may provide an overlap of similar voices, a forum such as the comment section of posts by NOSStories creates an overlap of many different voices. Cinelli et al. (2021, p.5) describe this as homogeneous clusters. These clusters can be observed within the comment sections of the analysed posts, with the most prolific being pro-Palestine, pro-Israel, pro-Ukraine, pro-Russia, and in less numbers ‘neutral’. An observation that was made was that many of the individual comments included knowledge that appeared to have been gathered in other online spaces. When comparing these clusters that form through the emergent expressions of prior knowledge, it becomes clear that the meaning making that people engage in translates to a notion of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ opinions and facts. This is in line with González-Bailón and Lelkes (2022, p.156), who explain this through social group dynamics when individuals are more exposed to people with similar values, beliefs and attitudes. This notion was observably dominant, as pro-Palestine comments could not be swayed to become pro-Israel, and vice-versa.

Additionally, there was an implied need for choosing a side in order to be allowed to participate in the discussion. The gatekeeping characteristic of participatory journalism in stage one as described by Engelke (2019, p.32) therefore no longer only applies to the news production stage, but is taken from the journalists in stage three and given to the audiences in the discussion forum. Engelke (2019, p.33) also states that stage three allows for the most audience agency over the news content. This thesis, however, shows that the agency the

audiences have over news content also extends to a social barrier of who gets to contribute and who does not. The two types of participatory journalism from the perspective of the newsroom are: participatory journalism as playground, and participatory journalism as source (Domingo, 2011, p.93). The former is clearly chosen within the posts that were analysed for this thesis, as NOSStories does not attempt to shape the comment section in any way. This leaves the commenters themselves to do it which, in combination with the echo chamber and homogeneous clusters, creates a severely incompetent discussion forum wherein commenters generally do not seek profundity but rather a means to express their opinion, nearly devoid of civil discussion and the deliberation described by Engelke (2020, p.449).

In order to maintain a desirable social contract within the comment section, the moderation as described by Domingo (2011, p.92) should not have a goal of removing unwanted comments, and is oppositional of his notion that interactivity between user and journalist is not necessary. The analysis of the data in this thesis shows that an authority that adheres to the ‘participatory journalism as playground’ approach could provide more deliberation in the comment section, while retaining a firm authority over the tone of comments in the comment section so that civil discourse becomes the natural approach to interaction for audiences in the comment section.

## **6.2. Limitations**

Considering the limitations of this thesis, the main limitations can be categorised in: limitations of resources, and limitations of research.

Firstly the limitations of resources is mainly concerned with the resources of the researcher. In this case, the time limitation and sample size result in this thesis being somewhat limited to just one online discussion forum (i.e. the account NOSStories), a selection of comments from these fora instead of all comments, and two specific cases within a specific time period. While this gives apt insight into the concepts explored in this thesis, it limits the generalisability of the research performed to other research under the same circumstances in order to perform a similar research. Additionally, limiting the scope of the research to only one platform may result in it being too dependent on it. Other platforms such as reddit, X, Facebook, or YouTube may yield different outcomes. Lastly, the account and comments that were analysed are Dutch, which limits the generalisability for research in other countries as it assumes a certain socio-cultural and socio-economic



background in its premise (e.g. the abundant access to the internet and a lack of censorship from government institutions).

Secondly, the limitations of research allude to the limitations inherent to the manner in which this research was conducted. The research deals with complex social phenomena on a platform that inherently rewards anonymity within interpersonal interactions. This may result in a specific selection of people that want to comment. However, what are the attitudes and opinions of those that do not comment whatsoever, or those that fail to respond somewhere in a discussion with other commenters. This thesis gives clear result into what happens in these comment sections, but is limited in answering why this happens. Additionally, the cases that were chosen may not be representative of how audiences respond to all military conflicts. These specific cases of military conflict are not ‘new’, as the tensions of these conflicts have been present for multiple years. While all military conflicts are unique, a certain mental preparation for these specific cases could have had influence over the results.

### **6.3. Implications**

From an academic perspective, the implications of these findings add to the concept of participatory journalism by approaching it from a perspective of online news consumption. While discussion fora and the presence of news media on social media are not new within the concept of participatory journalism, the dominance of social media is increasingly relevant. Individuals who do not know a world without internet are full-grown adults, and individuals who do not know a world without social media are young adults. This thesis emphasizes the effect of social media on news consumption and meaning making, provides more knowledge about how audiences engage with not only the news itself, but a simultaneous consumption and interaction with news and its audiences.

Additional implications could be primarily for the news organisation behind NOSStories, the NOS. this research gives insight into some social processes that happen in the comment section of their news posts. If they find themselves in the position where the silence is avoid dissonant behaviour from a position of self-protection, this thesis could provide further understanding of the processes behind specific behaviour, but also an insight into what could be undertaken to change this. Furthermore, this thesis could provide policy makers with more understanding of what happens in the obscurity of online news consumption. It is impossible and undesirable to monitor all private accounts that distribute news, but this understanding of the news consumption behaviour of a significant percentage

of the population could provide policy makers with knowledge to counteract certain detrimental societal trends concerning an eschewed perception of reality people may develop based on incorrect or incomplete news distribution channels.

#### **6.4. Future research**

As mentioned before, this thesis concerned itself with the question ‘what’ and not the question ‘why’. Future research should focus on identifying the underlying principles of the expressed behaviour that was observed in the comment sections. A suggestion could be to conduct interviews on a large scale in order to further elaborate on how individuals come to the conclusions based on specific news, where they find their news, what determines to further distribute this news, and what compels them to comment or not comment taking into consideration the type of comment they would leave.

Other suggestions for future research would be to conduct a cross-cultural replication of this thesis in order to identify differences in nationality in use of social media, but also in response to the news and other audience members with whom interactions take place. This could also include different social media platforms to test if emergent results are similar or different.

Finally, in order to identify causation, a quantitative study could be performed to find the underlying variables that are of influence on the behaviour and other trends that have been identified.

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## Appendix A

Main concepts	Sub-concepts	Signal words/phrases
Universalism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gatekeeping</li> <li>2. Ad hominem</li> <li>3. Privilege</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You cannot talk about this because you don't know anything about it; you are a fake account;</li> <li>2. your bio says enough about you; You look like such and such; Should not expect less from someone like you;</li> <li>3. You look like everything has always been handed to you; you are white so you will never understand; you are rich so you will never understand; you are Western so you will never understand; They did it to themselves</li> </ol>
Inclusivity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In/outgroup</li> <li>2. Societal marginalization</li> <li>3. Respect for different opinion(s)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They; those people; no one I know; everyone else; We;</li> <li>2. Immigrants; Palestinians; victims; unfair to -group-; Ukrainians; genocide; colonization</li> <li>3. Agree to disagree; No knowledge = no opinion accepted (&amp;vice versa); 'dumb reaction'</li> </ol>

Rationalism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emotional response</li> <li>2. Source naming / stating facts</li> <li>3. Appeal to logic</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Naming of any emotion ('this makes me sad, this makes me angry, this makes me happy; etc.');</li> <li>excessive use of interpunction (e.g. !!!! or ????)</li> <li>2. Outright stating the source of information, or stating information as facts (e.g. Israel has killed # of people)</li> <li>3. 'Everyone knows'; 'this is logical'; 'this does not make any sense'; 'this is not true'; 'this is framing'; Did you even watch the video?; (+satiric comments?)</li> </ol>
Agreement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accept/reject new information</li> <li>2. Attempt to diffuse conflict</li> <li>3. Asking a question</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 'That is true'; 'I did not know that before'; fair enough;</li> <li>2. It was not meant in this way; they did not mean it that way; let's remain respectable; I/they are entitled to their own opinion</li> <li>3. Asking a question, mainly characterized by use of the question mark (=?).</li> </ol>

Main concepts are based on Engelke (2020)

“Universalism: Participants of public discourse include not only elites and special interest groups but everyone and discourse grants everyone equal opportunities for contribution (Friess and Eilders 2015; Gastil 2008; Habermas 2006; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009; Stromer-Galley 2007).” (Engelke, 2020, p.450)

“Inclusivity: Discourse features a diversity of voices—especially from marginalized or disadvantaged groups—that interact with each other reciprocally, i.e., in a mutually beneficial manner that ensures all diverse voices are heard and replied to (Friess and Eilders

2015; Gastil 2008; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009; Stromer-Galley 2007). This in turn ensures that a deliberative discourse is truly democratic (Gastil 2008; Habermas 2006; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009).” (Engelke, 2020, p.450)

“Rationality: Contributions to discourse are rooted in reason, based on rational arguments, backed up by evidence and considered in light of counterarguments (Chambers2003; Friess and Eilders 2015; Gastil 2008; Habermas 2006; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009; Stromer-Galley 2007), which ensures the quality of the discourse (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009).” (Engelke, 2020, p.450)

“Agreement: Discourse strives toward finding common ground in a manner that remains mutually respectful and civil (Chambers 2003; Friess and Eilders 2015; Gastil 2008; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009). Participants are willing to revise and change their opinions in light of new information (Chambers 2003). Even though disagreements may remain, the goal is a solution acceptable to all those affected by it or at least the minimization of differences which in turn facilitates finding common ground in the future (Chambers 2003; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009).” (Engelke, 2020, p.450)