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Overcoming Hate: Jewish Minority Voices' Strategies for Participating in the News Media

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ABSTRACT

For a well-functioning and inclusive democracy, it is crucial that minority voices can participate in public debate and express their opinions through the news media. However, media participation can be demanding, especially considering the proliferation of online hate. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 self-identified Jews who have participated in Norwegian media *as Jews*, this article explores the strategies Jewish minority voices employ when participating in the news media, both to position themselves and achieve their aims as representatives of a small-sized and vulnerable minority, and to deal with the risk of and experiences with antisemitism. The findings show that it can be demanding and distressing, but also rewarding to participate in the media as a minority voice, and most often the motivations and gains outweigh the risks. Although it is common to experience antisemitic hate speech in the wake of media participation, this has not led the participants to withdraw from public engagement. Consequently, this article argues that hate speech does not necessarily represent a boundary for public participation. However, participating as a minority voice requires strong motivation, emotional resilience, and the ability to focus on the positive outcomes of media participation, including the possibility of social change.

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Introduction

For a well-functioning and inclusive democracy, it is crucial that a diversity of groups and voices can participate in public debate and voice their opinions through the news media. Considering that the media is a key arena for participation in the public sphere, it should from a democratic perspective be equally accessible to all citizens, including marginalised and vulnerable minority groups. Although digital media has given more people the opportunity to express themselves, the news media is still an important agenda-setting platform. It is, however, the editors and journalists who decide who has access and on what terms participation takes place (Shoemaker and Vos 2009) and research has indicated that for minorities access is limited (e.g., Berkowitz 2020). Studies have further suggested that when access is acquired, media participation can involve restrictions

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and risks, but also rewards—particularly in terms of the opportunity of being (fairly) represented (e.g., Eide 2010; 2011; Midtbøen 2018). A starting point for the present study is that more knowledge is needed about minorities' motivations for and experiences with participating in the media, specifically when gaining access and choosing to participate as a minority voice.

This article explores the motivations and experiences of Norwegian Jews who have participated in the news media *as* Jews, and thus have become vital public voices for a small-sized, diverse, and historically vulnerable minority (Døving 2022). This case is particularly interesting considering that Norway has one of the smallest Jewish populations in Europe, which was also the case prior to the Holocaust, when about 40–50 percent of Norwegian Jews were deported and killed. Despite being small in size, the Jewish minority still holds an important position in Norwegian society. While the focus of the article is on this specific minority, the study also illuminates more general issues related to media representation and participation by minority groups.

Although Jews have been living in Norway since the late nineteenth century and have official status as a national minority, research has shown how Jews and Judaism tend to be portrayed as something old-fashioned and foreign by Norwegian media (Døving 2016). Moreover, the Holocaust is also “a seemingly ever-present media frame”, which depicts Jews as eternal victims (Døving 2016, 12). Studies from Germany have further shown that although journalists see it as a duty to advocate for minority inclusion and give voice to the Jewish community, Jews perceive the media coverage of topics related to them as excessively negative and exclusionary, focusing too much on victimhood and an unclear distinction between Jews and Israel, and too little on everyday Jewish life (Baugut 2020; 2021). Overall, this indicates that Jewish voices participating in the news media may want to contribute with new perspectives, knowledge, and nuances in news coverage and public debates that concern the Jewish minority today.

However, participating in the media can be demanding and distressing, especially in the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2017), where the rise of social media and comment sections has led to concerns about the proliferation of incivility and hate (e.g., European Commission 2016; Kalsnes and Ihlebæk 2021). While being confronted with harsh and hostile reactions can be uncomfortable for anyone, hate speech against minorities is considered particularly problematic, because in addition to harming the targeted individual, it can also affect other members of the minority group in question, leading minorities to feel disempowered and excluded from society (Awan and Zempi 2016; Gelber and McNamara 2016). In the context of media participation, this constitutes a democratic problem if specific groups or perspectives are silenced or choose to withdraw from public engagement and debates (Fladmoe and Nadim 2017; Midtbøen, Steen-Johnsen, and Thorbjørnsrud 2017).

While there are many studies on racist and hateful content on digital platforms, few studies have investigated minorities' experiences with online hate (Bliuc et al. 2018; Matoros-Fernández and Farkas 2021). This also applies to research on antisemitic hate speech. Even though digital media is the presumed main arena for manifestations of antisemitism today, little is known about Jews' experiences with and the impact of online antisemitism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018). Consequently, another starting point for the present study is that more knowledge is needed about experiences with hate speech in digital media, and the consequences for those that are targeted.

This article thus focuses on how “public Jews” navigate between, on the one hand, their motivation to illuminate issues that are important to them, and on the other hand, the risk of experiencing antisemitism when participating in the media as Jews. Taking this dilemma as a point of departure, the present study asks: How do Norwegian Jews navigate when participating as minority voices in the news media? Analytically, the focus is on the variety of strategies they apply in different phases of their media participation, both to position themselves and achieve their aims as Jewish voices and to deal with the risk of and experiences with antisemitism. This is of great importance because in addition to informing discussions about the relationship between (digital) media and antisemitism, the article also contributes to research on minorities’ conditions for media participation, and the consequences of hate in this context. While previous studies mostly have explored these issues separately, the overall aim of this study is to address this from a holistic perspective, thus providing comprehensive and valuable insights into what media participation entails for minority voices.

The study is based on qualitative interviews with 15 Jewish informants who have participated in Norwegian national news media *as Jews*, as sources in news coverage of matters concerning the Jewish minority and/or by engaging in public debate through opinion pieces. In contrast to quantitative research on the interplay between hate speech and public participation (e.g., Fladmoe and Nadim 2017), the interviews thus provide unique in-depth insight into the difficult choices that these minority voices face. Theoretically, the article is inspired by research on media representations of and media participation by minorities, as well as perspectives on the impact of hate, both online and offline. Overall, the findings show that it can be demanding and distressing, but also rewarding to participate in the media as a Jewish minority voice, and most often the motivations and gains outweigh the risks. Although it is common to experience antisemitic hate speech in the wake of media participation, this has not led these participants to withdraw from engaging in the news media. Consequently, this article argues that hate speech does not necessarily represent a boundary for public participation. However, participating as a minority voice requires strong motivation, emotional resilience, and the ability to focus on the positive outcomes of media participation, including the possibility of social change.

Minorities and the News Media: Representation and Participation

The media plays a major role in processes of exclusion and inclusion of minorities in society, because media representations can both reflect and influence ideas about who “we” are, and the boundaries of who constitutes “us” and “them” (e.g., Alexander 2006; Cottle 2000; Luengo and Ihlebæk 2019). Research has suggested that minority groups have generally been misrepresented in the news media, since they are often portrayed by the use of negative stereotypes (Ahmed and Matthes 2017; Bleich, Bloemraad, and de Graauw 2015; Døving 2016; van Dijk 1991). This in turn can have consequences, both for the minorities’ sense of belonging and for the majority’s view of minorities. In an extensive study on American newspaper coverage of Muslims and Islam, Bleich and van der Veen (2022, 142) have thus described the media as “a key site for boundary-making”, and argued that negative news coverage can help “draw and reinforce boundaries” between Muslims and the majority population (Bleich and van der Veen 2022, 144).

Following this line of thought, the fact that minorities participate in the news media can be seen as crucial to challenge such boundaries at the societal level, including marginalisation, stigmatisation, and discrimination of minority groups. However, few studies have explored questions concerning minorities' experiences with media participation.

Previous studies have indicated that when ethnic and religious minorities participate in the media, it is often under specific conditions that are linked to their (assumed) identity. Studies have demonstrated how journalists, in their search for sources, tend to ascribe individuals with a (visible) minority background a specific role or identity as an ethnic or religious "other", regardless of whether they would like to represent the specific group or perspective in question (e.g., implicitly being labelled "liberal Muslim" or "immigrant") (Eide 2010; 2011; Midtbøen 2018). Nadim (2017) has further shown how concerns about such "ascribed representation" can function as a barrier to participation for minority voices who have not yet entered the mediated public sphere. To illustrate, Nadim (2017) highlights how the two Jewish informants in her study expressed reluctance to participate due to concerns about being reduced "*the Norwegian Jew*" or becoming "*a public Jew*". In this article, the question is not whether the minority voices under study have access to or want to participate in the news media as Jews, but rather why and under what conditions they have chosen to do so. In-depth insights into both motivations and restrictions, pros and cons, are important to elucidate how minority voices navigate when participating in the media.

Research on media experiences among ethnic and religious minorities has suggested that individuals with a minority background may have different motivations for participating. While some would like to nuance the media coverage of their religious community or minority group, others wish to engage as any other citizen, promoting their personal or their (non-minority) organisations' political views (Eide 2010). However, it is the editors and journalists who control the news agenda and the mediated public debate, and for minorities, access is often limited to specific minority-related topics, for example, (controversial) religious practices, immigration, or integration. Consequently, these individuals constantly negotiate with journalists about who they represent, which issues they want to engage in, and which topics they want to avoid, strategically positioning themselves as minority voices in the news media and public debate (Eide 2010; Midtbøen 2018). Occasionally, they also succeed in "transcending the 'minority box'" (Midtbøen 2018, 345).

As for Jewish participants, they might want to use their voice to broaden the scope of how the Jewish minority is perceived by the wider public, since news coverage tends to focus on victimhood (Baugut 2020; Døving 2016). In Norway, the media coverage of and the often contentious debates about the Israel-Palestine conflict have in some cases been characterised by anti-Jewish rhetoric, which may also motivate Jews to react and contribute with their perspectives (Brustad and Lien 2016; Lenz and Geelmuyden 2020). Research has further indicated that antisemitism and the Israel-Palestine conflict are topics that some would avoid, due to a perception that personal views go against established positions and the risk of being ascribed specific opinions and beliefs (Nadim 2017). This suggests that Jews might not be willing or able to speak freely on all topics related to their Jewish identity, which constitute a so-called social boundary if certain views and perspectives are silenced or excluded from the media and public debates (see Lamont and Molnár 2002; Midtbøen, Steen-Johnsen, and Thorbjørnsrud 2017). As discussed in the

next section, being the (potential) target of hate speech can also constitute a social boundary, if it causes minorities to limit their media participation.

The Proliferation and Impact of Online Hate

Following the rise of social media and comment sections, minorities who choose to publicly engage through the news media must also deal with the risk that they might be targets of hate speech on a variety of digital platforms. Multiple studies have explored questions concerning the proliferation of online hate and how it may be countered (e.g., Bliuc et al. 2018; Kalsnes and Ihlebæk 2021; Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas 2021).

As for online antisemitism, it appears to be multifaceted and far-reaching, occurring both in mainstream and extreme digital environments, including on major social media platforms such as Twitter (Ozalp et al. 2020) and fringe platforms such as 4chan and Gab (Zannettou et al. 2020). Antisemitic ideas are also promoted through the online propaganda of both neo-Nazi (Haanshuus and Ihlebæk 2021) and Islamist organisations (Rick-enbacher 2019), and expressed by debaters in the comment sections of far-right alternative media (Haanshuus 2022) and left-leaning mainstream media (Becker 2021). Furthermore, although antisemitic rhetoric is usually triggered by political issues, it also occurs in online discussions on other topics such as football (Seijbel, van Sterkenburg, and Oonk 2022). Despite concerns about this as a seemingly ubiquitous phenomenon, it is important to note that not everyone who engages in public debates through the media—whether online or in the news media—experiences hate and harassment (Fladmoe and Nadim 2017; Midtbøen 2018).

Less is known about experiences and consequences of hate in digital media, but research has indicated that hate speech can function as an obstacle to public engagement and participation. In a large-scale quantitative study among Norwegian adults, Fladmoe and Nadim (2017, 71) have found that receiving what one perceives as hate speech can discourage people from expressing their opinions and lead them to withdraw from online public debates, and consequently, “hate speech and other unpleasant messages can represent social boundaries to the exercise of free speech”. Other studies have shown that experiences with hate speech, whether as face-to-face encounters or as prejudice circulating in society, also can lead to a variety of negative emotional and physical consequences, including fear, pain, and vulnerability, as well as feelings of being disempowered, silenced, and excluded from society (Awan and Zempi 2016; Gelber and McNamara 2016). Although the present article mostly focuses on experiences and effects of hate in digital media, it also considers that the differences between online and offline hate might not be as clear as the terms imply. As argued by Awan and Zempi (2016, 2) in their study on anti-Muslim hate crime, considering the “continuity of anti-Muslim hostility in both the virtual and the physical world”, targets of such hate “live in fear because of the possibility of online threats materialising in the ‘real world’”.

When studying the impact of hate speech, it is also important to consider that despite all these possible harms, among those who report having such experiences, there is also resilience and potential for agency. By exploring how young people of colour resist racism in their everyday life, Ellefsen, Banafsheh, and Sandberg (2022) have identified five forms of resistance among their participants. These strategies include ignoring racism, for example, by using humour to downplay the experience, confronting the sender,

sharing the experience with friends and family, reporting it to the police, and taking part in organised social protest. Similar resistance and coping strategies have also been identified in studies on young Muslims' "everyday resistance" to anti-Muslim hostility (Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022) and young adults' responses to racism and sexism online (Ortiz 2021). In other words, this indicates that it is possible to overcome such experiences, which can potentially also have a mobilising effect.

Methodology

This study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 Jewish individuals who were strategically selected because they have participated in Norwegian national news media, either as a source (i.e., interviewed on TV, in newspapers or in other major media outlets) and/or by writing opinion pieces, while also being open about their Jewish identity in this specific context. The interviews thus provide unique and important insights into what it entails being a self-identified, visible minority voice participating in the news media. Most participants were recruited based on the researcher's previous knowledge of their media participation, and some were recruited through snowball sampling. Four potential informants declined or did not respond to interview requests.

Considering the small size of the Jewish minority in Norway, estimated to be about 1500 people in a population of 5.4 million, the number of participants is considered high. Furthermore, although the ways in which the participants self-identify as Jewish were not a focus of the interviews, many reflected on their Jewish identity by relating it to religion or cultural affiliation and family background. This indicates that the informants constitute a diverse sample of Norwegian Jews (for an overview of Jewish identity in Norway, see Døving 2022). The sample is also varied in terms of gender, age, and media experience. Specifically, it consists of ten women and five men. Five participants were aged 20–39, four were aged 40–59, and six were aged 60–85. While most of them either have extensive or quite a lot of media experience, having participated in the media often or occasionally over the last few decades, some informants were less experienced, having only participated once or twice. Moreover, while some have participated in the media due to their role as a spokesperson for Jewish organisations, others stressed that they have represented themselves. In some cases, it was a combination of their public role, which helped gain access to the media, and a personal commitment to the issue in question. Regardless of their role and level of media experience, several informants mentioned that they are also regularly contacted by journalists asking them to contribute to news coverage on topics related to the Jewish minority. Some also have media experience that is not related to being Jewish; however, these experiences are not reported here.

The interviews were conducted in person ($N = 13$) and digitally on Zoom ($N = 2$) and lasted from 45 min to 2.5 h, with the average interview lasting about 1.5 h. The interviews were semi-structured and covered four main topics: (1) The informants' perceptions of antisemitism in Norway, (2) their experiences with participating in the news media as Jews, (3) experiences with antisemitism and other types of reactions because of their media visibility, and (4) how these experiences have affected them. Considering the overall aim of the article, the analysis focuses on the latter three topics.

Based on an exploratory and recursive qualitative approach, the transcribed interviews were coded by the author in several stages, focusing on how the informants navigate in the different phases of their media participation: Their motivations, choices and precautions when entering and participating in the media as Jews, how they deal with reactions online, their experiences with hate and its impact, including whether they would like to continue engaging in the media. While the coding process was informed by previous research on media and minorities' participation, as well as perspectives on experiences with, effects of and responses to hate, the specific analytical focus on strategies was a result of an inductive and interpretive close reading of interview data. The overall aim was thus to identify the variety of strategies that the participants under study employ in before, during, and after their media participation, both to position themselves and achieve their aims as Jewish voices and to deal with the risk of and experiences with anti-semitism. While the strategies identified mostly are based on the informants' intentional choices, the interviews also indicated that strategies have in some cases been unconsciously employed.

The interviews were based on informed consent and conducted in accordance with the Norwegian Personal Data Act and the national ethical guidelines for research. In the analysis, information about the participants' specific age and other identifiable characteristics have been left out due to considerations for their anonymity. In cases where the specific examples referred to may be recognisable to a wider audience, the participants have approved that these be published. All quotes have been translated from Norwegian to English by the author.

Analysis

Overall, the study shows that the participants have employed a variety of different strategies to navigate when participating in the news media. In the following analysis, these strategies are presented and linked to the participants' motivations, perceptions of risk, and specific experiences in different phases of their media participation. Finally, the consequences of these experiences are also discussed, particularly focusing on the prospects for further media participation.

Engaging in the News Media as a Minority Voice

Although many expressed doubts about becoming a public person or a "public Jew", emphasising their concerns about demanding debates or being exposed too much, as well as fear of being a target of hostile or violent reactions due to their visible Jewish identity, it is nevertheless vital for the participants that their perspectives are part of the media coverage and public debates on questions concerning the Jewish minority. However, they also take precautions before participating in the media.

First of all, the informants deliberately choose to speak out on specific topics, while avoiding others, strategically positioning themselves as Jewish voices in the news media. Although it can be emotionally difficult, antisemitism is the most common topic to engage in, either as a historical event (the Holocaust or family history) or a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., antisemitic prejudice or violence). Some emphasised that they have spoken about antisemitism in the context of more general minority-related issues,

such as prevention of hate speech and racism, and the importance of minority rights and diversity in the Norwegian society. Another common topic, which is perceived to be unproblematic to engage in, is various aspects of Jewish identity, such as Jewish life in Norway or Jewish culture and traditions. Furthermore, about half of the interviewees have commented on the Norwegian media coverage of or public debate about Israel, which many said was difficult. Two informants have also engaged in contentious debates about religious practices.

Reflecting on their motivations for publicly engaging in these issues, many participants, both among those who have represented a Jewish organisation and those who have not, emphasised that they perceive it as “a duty” or “a responsibility”, explicitly or implicitly referring to the need for someone to stand up for the small-sized and historically vulnerable Jewish minority in Norway. In this context, some stressed that they do it on behalf of those “who do not have a voice” or “never got a life”. Others emphasised the importance of community involvement in general, and increased awareness about anti-semitism and what we can learn from history and the Holocaust. Another motivation is to increase knowledge and help normalise and nuance for the wider public what it means to be Jewish in Norway today, so that Jews are not only portrayed and perceived as victims. As a young female participant said, “The vast majority have never met a Jew before”. Although the issues often are serious, one experienced participant further characterised it as “exciting and fun” to engage in public debate through the media.

The main motivation for engaging in Israel-related issues is that the Norwegian media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict is perceived to be narrow and biased, which in turn tends to negatively influence Norwegian Jews. Consequently, those who have spoken about this have aimed to provide more nuance to the public debate, specifically to raise awareness about Israel-related antisemitism and how it affects Jews in Norway. Overall, these reflections about motivation demonstrate that the participants see it both as necessary and rewarding to contribute knowledge, new perspectives and nuances to what they perceive as either deficient or one-sided media coverage of and public debates on issues affecting the Jewish minority in Norway (see also Brustad and Lien 2016; Døving 2016). In this context, one informant also stressed that he increasingly experience being “almost censored”, because newspapers refuse to publish “deviant opinions” about Israel (i.e., pro-Israeli arguments).

Regarding topics the informants have avoided or do not want to comment on, the Israel-Palestine *conflict* and Israeli *politics* were the most prominent issues. A young female informant expressed herself as follows: “Everything that has to do with Israel and Palestine - I have deliberately said ‘no, thank you’. And there have been many inquiries”. She further added:

“I think I speak on behalf of 90 percent of Jews in Norway when I say that debate is uncomfortable, because it is an extremely complicated debate, which is simplified with a few repetitive arguments, and there is very little room for dialogue.”

Others also mentioned that they have rejected requests about this topic because they perceive the issue to be complex and the debates to be controversial, aggressive, uncomfortable, and one-dimensional, or because the premise was that since they are Jewish, journalists have assumed that they have strong opinions about Israel. Some also noted that they avoid these debates because they perceive it as impossible to combine

having a public opinion about Israel with engaging in debates about antisemitism. This may be explained by the fact that discussions about the interplay between antisemitism and criticism of Israel tend to be highly politicised and polarised (see Waxman, Schraub, and Hosein 2022). As indicated by previous research (Nadim 2017), this also suggests that there are topics many Jewish participants do not want to talk about due to a risk of being ascribed specific opinions and beliefs, and thus it is better to stay silent.

Despite being clear about what they did *not* want to talk about, some have experienced journalists going back on their initial agreement by asking inappropriate questions on live TV. A young female informant, who was invited to the Norwegian national broadcaster's evening news to increase knowledge about Jewish life and antisemitism in Norway, said she was also explicitly asked about her opinion on the situation in Palestine. She further explained that she does not remember the exact question because she "blacked out" and "felt betrayed" by the journalist, an incident which negatively influenced her relationship with the media for a long time. An older and more experienced female informant told of a similar situation on live TV where she, by virtue of being a representative of a Jewish organisation, was asked if she "intended to apologise for what Israel is doing". This indicates that some journalists are unaware of the importance of distinguishing between the state of Israel and Jews in general (in this case: Norwegian Jews), and that Jews may experience being the subject of ascribed representation, in which they are implicitly or explicitly held responsible for and/or expected to distance themselves from Israel's policies and actions.

A second strategy employed by many is to carefully formulate their message, especially if the topic is controversial. A male informant with extensive media experience stressed the general importance of "not being one-eyed". Others emphasised how they choose their words carefully, particularly if they engage in Israel-related debates. A young female informant explained how she has "a very strategic way of speaking", which involves being well prepared. She further added:

"I have found my defence mechanism. My way of dealing with it is to play on emotion for all it's worth. No one can argue against that. I will never say in the media that something is a truth. I try to portray everything as nuanced as possible – nothing is black and white".

Moreover, several informants emphasised how they always ask journalists for a quote check to be sure that their message appears correct and in the right context, which decreases the likelihood of being misunderstood and receiving negative and unpleasant reactions. In this context, another young female informant explained why this is particularly important when participating in the media as a minority voice: "I wouldn't do that if I spoke out as a student or Oslo resident. It is very sensitive as a Jew. I feel like there's a big risk ... that I feel that vulnerability". Overall, this suggests that it is more difficult and potentially risky to participate in the media as a Jew than as a member of the general population, and that it is necessary to be well-prepared.

Dealing with Reactions in Digital Media

After participating in the media, the informants must navigate reactions from the public. Following the rise of social media and comment sections as arenas for public debate, both positive and negative responses are more accessible than ever. While an obvious

advantage of seeking out such reactions can be to get encouraging feedback and support, there is also a risk of being exposed to unpleasant and hateful comments. An overall finding is that the public Jews under study have different strategies for dealing with responses to their media appearance.

One common strategy is to regularly stay updated on reactions in digital media. About one-third of the informants said they frequently read comment sections because they are curious, and because they seek out positive feedback and confirmation of their own views. For some, reading comment sections is also a way of staying informed about the debate in question and the different opinions that exist, including views that might be unpleasant or harmful. A female informant (aged 40–59) thus described this as “no strategy”, emphasising that she “reads everything” to know more about “the deeper layers of public opinion”. Another strategy employed by about half of the informants is to follow online debates occasionally, but at the same time limit how much they read, either because they do not find it rewarding enough or because they want to protect themselves from harm. Reflecting more in-depth on the ambivalence of reading comment sections, a female informant with quite a lot of media experience stated:

“[I am] a bit preoccupied with what people think. It really is an emotional roller coaster to read. It is very nice to be praised. And then when the negative comments come – they hit sore spots, which is a bit difficult to deal with”.

She further emphasised that it is essential to “learning to be thick-skinned”. Among those who follow discussions online, another common strategy is to try to focus on all the positive reactions rather than the few bad ones, thus reducing the harmful effects of unpleasant and hostile comments. In sum, this shows that comment sections are not only harmful since they also can provide motivating feedback and insight into the debates in question. However, dealing with them can be emotionally demanding.

Finally, although it is less common *not* to seek out any such reactions, two informants said they completely avoid comment sections to protect themselves from emotional distress and harm. An older female informant (aged 60–85) characterised reading comment sections as “self-tormenting”. Another elderly female informant with extensive media experience emphasised that she “knows there is a lot [hostility] out there”, and thus she avoids engaging with any reactions online, because she knows that reading hostile comments would significantly affect both her feeling of empowerment and how she expresses herself in public debates. This illustrates that the fear of antisemitic and other hostile comments limits how these informants participate in digital media.

In addition to these digital strategies, some interviewees noted that they have made sure their phone number and home address are not publicly available, thus reducing the risk of being exposed to (physical) threats and increasing their feeling of safety. A young female informant noted that she has removed her phone number from the public register to be less accessible after experiencing journalists who were “not very concerned with journalistic ethics”. Furthermore, some informants have been subject to various security measures under the auspices of the police. The findings further suggest that many informants conduct their own risk assessments. Consequently, their digital and non-digital strategies and practices are not necessarily a result of direct and personal experiences with harassment or hate, but rather based on their perceptions of potential threats, both online and offline, and concerns about online hate materialising

in “the real world” (see also Awan and Zempi 2016). As a young female interviewee stated, “I feel very safe and well, and I almost never experience antisemitism. [...] But it only takes one person to lose that sense of security”. Furthermore, some informants linked these risk assessments to awareness about historical and contemporary antisemitism, and their own family history, which is shaped by the Holocaust.

When asked specifically whether they have experienced antisemitism after participating in the media, 13 of 15 interviewees answered affirmatively. Most emphasised that this has taken place in digital media, particularly in the comment sections of online newspapers and on Facebook, but also on other digital platforms. Some have received emails, text messages or private messages on social media, which means that experiences with online antisemitism can be independent of whether the participants avoid comment sections or not. These antisemitic expressions, which usually come from unknown online debaters or “the man on the street”, include prejudiced or hostile statements about Jews, for instance, claims about how Jews cannot be trusted or being called a “Jewish whore”. Comments can also include conspiratorial ideas about Jewish power and greed. In Israel-related discussions, the participants reported that comments often include generalising claims where debaters do not distinguish between criticism of Israel and Jews, which means that Jews are held accountable for Israel’s policies and actions. This type of argument is believed to come from people with sympathies for the pro-Palestinian movement, the broader political left or Muslims who oppose Israel. Furthermore, some informants noted that they also have been targeted in extreme-right and neo-Nazi online propaganda. Furthermore, a male informant with extensive media experience mentioned that his name frequently occurs on the websites of other conspiracy theorists. Overall, this shows that is common for public Jews to experience online antisemitism, which can occur on different digital platforms, both mainstream and extreme, and originate from a variety of senders and ideologies.

Regarding “offline” experiences, some have also encountered anti-Jewish prejudice in social settings (not always related to their media participation) or received offensive letters in their mailbox. The most severe example of antisemitism was experienced by a male informant who received a bullet in the mail after participating in a televised debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict, an incident which the police defined as a death threat. Many years later they still do not know who was behind the threat. This further illustrates that antisemitism comes in many different shapes and forms, and regardless of (digital) strategies, there is also a certain risk of experiencing severe threats when participating as a minority voice in the news media.

Coping with Experiences of Antisemitism

Regarding specific ways of responding to experiences with antisemitism, this was not an explicit theme in interviews. However, two informants mentioned that they have reported antisemitic incidents to the police (i.e., the one who received a bullet in the mail and another one who was the target of antisemitic messages from a far-right politician on Twitter). Based on the informants’ reflections about experiencing online antisemitism, it seems that responding in the comment sections is not a common practice. Some mentioned that they sometimes discuss with their Jewish friends if they experience something unpleasant.

A more widespread strategy is to ignore or downplay such experiences. Most notably, many informants talked about how the anti-Jewish comments they have read in connection with their media participation were not directed at them personally. Consequently, they do not necessarily think—or choose not to think—about these comments as direct or personal experiences of antisemitism. A young female informant explained it like this:

“The comments people have written are antisemitism. But I think, in a way, that it is not antisemitism directed *at me*. I think there are people who do not know what they are doing and just throw something out there. [...] Although it is antisemitism, but ... It is not personally targeting me. [...] At least that is how I choose to interpret it. It is easier to live with.”

This also indicates that it can be uncomfortable and agonising to think about such comments as experiences of antisemitism, and thus some informants choose not to.

Another way of downplaying such experiences is to think about the senders as ridiculous people or as a marginal phenomenon with no support (e.g., neo-Nazis). Similar coping strategies have also been identified in studies on racism and anti-Muslim hostility (Ellefsen, Banafsheh, and Sandberg 2022; Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022). Furthermore, several informants mentioned that they perceive many of the comments to be prejudiced, but not as explicit hate, implicitly arguing that (unintentional) prejudice is less dangerous or harmful or severe than (intentional) hate. Regarding the question of severity, a young female informant further emphasised, “I tend to say that I am very lucky. I have not experienced any physical violence because I am Jewish. Which is a bit strange to say - that you have been lucky because of that”. This specific example shows how she understands and downplays her experiences with online antisemitism by comparing them to the risk of more terrifying, direct, and physical threats. The findings further indicate that others also ignore or downplay their experiences by comparing them to such worst-case scenarios, since most informants said it would be worse to experience antisemitic prejudice or hostility “in the real world”.

Reflecting on the impact of experiencing online antisemitism, many said they are emotionally affected, and it is common to feel angry, discouraged, depressed, hurt, or scared. Sometimes these feelings can be independent of personal experiences, and rather linked to the history of antisemitism or to family history. A quote by a female informant (age 40–59) illustrates this point: “My whole life has been influenced by the Holocaust, which is the ultimate form of antisemitism. So, I cannot say anything other than that my life is ... It is like a cornerstone of my existence”. Despite these negative emotions, the study further shows that experiences with antisemitism, and the general awareness of antisemitism as a societal problem, also can have a mobilising effect. A female informant (aged 20–39) with quite a lot of media experience explained it like this: “The fact that so many people have such strong opinions about who I am has made me more conscious about my [Jewish] identity, and I have often chosen to write about that”. She further added:

“If [antisemitism] had been a non-topic, if it had been completely unproblematic in society, then perhaps it would not have been something I would have thought so much about. It has greatly strengthened my Jewish identity – for better or worse”.

The fact that antisemitism is the most common topic to be publicly engaged in also confirms this mobilising effect.

When asked if they would like to continue participating in the media, most informants said they would, which shows that experiences with antisemitic hate speech do not discourage these individuals from expressing their views. A male informant with extensive media experience expressed his thoughts about further participating like this: “Because I feel that I have something to say. I have always felt that”. Most other informants also would like to contribute more, because they see it as rewarding and important to inform the public about issues that concern the Jewish minority specifically, and in some cases also questions concerning minorities more generally. Some have also had doubts about further participation. Reflecting on the risk of being harassed versus “the damned duty” to participate, which comes with gaining access to the public, an experienced female informant stated, “I often think that I do not bother [to participate] anymore, but then I still do [...] It would be cowardly to withdraw”. Discussing her overall motivation for participating, she further added:

“If I could do this full-time, I would probably have moved [to] the European level and raised the debate [...] It would have been really exciting. After all, this is regularly discussed - the fight against antisemitism and how we can make things better for the minorities in Europe.”

Others said that they occasionally have doubts, and that they therefore are (more) selective about which issues they get involved in and take breaks from participating when needed. Finally, a young female informant stressed that she would like to participate more in the future, but maybe not as a Jew: “I work with matters that are very much in the public eye and in the public discourse. I don’t know if I will be [in the media] under the auspices of the fact that I am Jewish. Because it is very tiring”. This specific example illustrates that it can be particularly demanding to participate in the media as a minority voice.

As for the few who said they have stopped participating have had different reasons for doing so. An older female informant, with an extensive track record of being in the media, said she is less active now, mostly due to a less public role, and emphasised the importance of making room for younger and new Jewish voices. The only informant who has completely stopped being in the media is he who received a death threat in the mail. Reflecting on further media participation after this experience, he stated: “I have wanted to speak out, but I have not [done it] yet because I have felt the consequences”. Although he would like to engage more in the future, he was not sure if he could or should, especially out of consideration for his family and his own safety. Consequently, this illustrates that experience with a severe personal threat can cause individuals to withdraw from participating.

Conclusion

For a well-functioning and inclusive democracy, it is crucial that a diversity of groups and voices can participate in public debate and voice their opinions through the news media. For minority groups, it can be particularly important to gain access and contribute with their perspectives, since they tend to be misrepresented through negative news coverage and by the use of stereotypes (e.g., Ahmed and Matthes 2017; Baugut 2020; Bleich and van der Veen 2022; Døving 2016). Taking the dilemma between the need to illuminate issues that are important to them as Jews and the risk of experiencing antisemitism as

a point of departure, this article has explored how Norwegian Jews navigate when participating as minority voices in the news media. By focusing on the strategies they employ in different phases of their media participation, to achieve their aims but also to deal with potential risks and experiences with hate, this study has contributed with a holistic perspective on what media participation entails for minority voices.

Overall, the findings suggest that it can be highly rewarding to participate in the media as a minority voice, and very often the motivations and (perceived) gains outweigh the risks. Contrary to what previous research on experiences with and effects of hate speech has suggested (e.g., Fladmoe and Nadim 2017; Gelber and McNamara 2016), this study has demonstrated that fear of and experiences with antisemitic hate speech online has *not* discouraged the Jewish voices under study from participating in the media. This article thus argues that hate speech does not necessarily represent a boundary for public participation. The findings rather suggest that awareness of antisemitism, historically and in the present, has had a mobilising effect on many of these participants, which has led them to engage in the news media. However, doing this is both demanding and distressing, and participating as a minority voice requires strong motivation, emotional resilience, and the ability to focus on the potential positive outcomes of media participation.

The study further shows that these “public Jews” are particularly motivated by an overall desire to inform the wider public about various forms of antisemitism and the diverse Jewish minority in Norway, which in turn is considered important for reducing and preventing prejudice and hate towards Jews. The findings also indicate that in addition to engaging in these issues on behalf of or out of consideration for the Jewish minority specifically, many participants are also concerned with improving the situation for minorities more generally. The fact that these minority voices are able and willing to participate in the news media is vital, considering that how minority groups are portrayed can influence processes of inclusion and exclusion in the broader society (e.g., Alexander 2006; Bleich and van der Veen 2022; Cottle 2000; Luengo and Ihlebæk 2019).

While it is difficult to determine the specific effects of the presence of Jewish voices in the news media, a research report on attitudes towards Jews in Norway has shown that the proportion of the population with marked prejudice against Jews decreased from 12 percent in 2011 to 8 percent in 2017. The report further suggest that “the explanation may lie in a shift in public opinion, where media and politics have shown increased awareness of antisemitism as a problem in Norwegian society in response to, among other things, terrorist attacks on Jews in Europe” (Hoffmann and Moe 2017, 7). Some of the participants in the present study have also contributed to this increased attention to antisemitism, through their long-term involvement in the media. In addition to a possible impact on public opinion, more nuanced and more positive media representations might also reduce Jews’ concerns about being perceived as “strangers” in their home country (see Baugut 2020).

Although the focus of this research has been on minority voices’ media participation, the findings can also shed light on journalistic ethics and the role of journalists in reducing prejudice and hate. For example, some participants have experienced being asked questions about the Israel-Palestine conflict against their will. This type of ascribed representation is especially problematic if Jews, individually or as a group, are held accountable for Israeli policies and actions. Journalists should also have in mind that issues related to

victimhood can be particularly emotional or sensitive for their sources to engage in, and that the media coverage potentially can reproduce stereotypes and cause feelings of exclusion (Baugut 2020; Døving 2016). Finally, considering that many of the reported experiences with antisemitism were linked to newspapers' comment sections, it is important that news organisations conduct comment moderation. However, the findings also indicate that this can be a challenging task, since it requires awareness of and knowledge about a wide range of antisemitic ideas and how they may be expressed.

This study has some limitations, considering that it focused specifically on Jewish minority voices, within one specific national context. Future research should explore other minorities' motivations and strategies for media participation and experiences with prejudice and hate, and also consider cross-country comparisons. Furthermore, while the informants in this study was recruited based on their visibility as Jews, it would be useful to know more about the media experiences and strategies of individuals who have not been open about their identity, and the impact of online hate on minority individuals who have not participated in the news media. Despite these limitations, this study provides important knowledge about what it entails to be a minority voice in the mediated and increasingly digital public sphere.

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