Old Hate in New Media: Understandings of Antisemitism and Boundary-Making in the Norwegian Digital Public Sphere

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Abstract

While concern about antisemitism is growing, especially online, agreement about what exactly constitutes antisemitism is declining, especially when it appears in contexts other than those associated with Nazism.

Based on four empirical case studies and combining various qualitative analyses of digital content and semi-structured interviews, this thesis explores expressions of antisemitic hate speech and how the discursive boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are perceived, dealt with, and experienced by different actors in the Norwegian digital public sphere. These include key political actors on the far right and the left, as well as members of the small and historically vulnerable Jewish minority. Theoretically, the thesis combines sociological boundary theory with perspectives from media studies, antisemitism studies and multidisciplinary research on online hate.

The thesis shows how the neo-Nazi organisation Nordic Resistance Movement and online debaters in various comment sections push boundaries by producing and promoting antisemitic content in both explicit and implicit ways. It also shows how "anti-Islamic" far-right alternative media and left-wing political organisations draw boundaries through comment moderation on their digital platforms. A key finding is that antisemitic hate speech is a diverse and complex phenomenon that can be difficult to identify. Finally, the thesis also sheds light on the experiences of antisemitic hate speech among Norwegian "public Jews".

Beyond the empirical findings, the thesis contributes to media studies by proposing an analytical framework for how the concepts of boundaries and boundary-making can be used to understand different key dimensions and dynamics of the digital public sphere, in particular, how hateful content is communicated and countered, and the consequences for those targeted.

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1 Introduction

After the Holocaust, the genocide of six million European Jews during World War II, there has been a broad consensus in Western liberal democracies that antisemitism is illegitimate and unacceptable (Bachner, 1999; Bergmann & Erb, 1986; Hoffmann & Moe, 2020). As a result, overt expressions of prejudice and hate towards Jews have been largely discredited and banned from the public sphere. Yet antisemitism has not disappeared. In recent years, a large majority of Jews, both in Norway and elsewhere in Europe, have reported that they perceive it to be both widespread and increasing (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018; Moe, 2022). The online sphere appears to be the most important arena for manifestations of antisemitism today, with 89 per cent of European Jews identifying antisemitism on the internet and social media as a significant problem (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018: 21-23).

This suggests that the rise of digital media and the structural shift to a digital public sphere have enabled antisemitism in public discourse. However, the relationship between digital media and antisemitic hate speech remains an under-researched topic. Moreover, as Waxman, Schraub and Hosein (2022: 1803) have argued, "while concern about antisemitism is growing, agreement on what actually constitutes antisemitism is shrinking". In recent years, antisemitism has become a contested concept and phenomenon, especially when it appears in contexts other than those associated with Nazism. This thesis thus explores expressions of antisemitic hate speech and how the discursive boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are perceived, dealt with, and experienced by different actors in the Norwegian digital public sphere, including key political actors on the far right and the left, as well as among members of the small and historically vulnerable Jewish minority.

In the digital age, there are countless different platforms and participatory services where people can express themselves, giving many more and different individuals and political groups the power and opportunity to voice their opinions and engage in public debate, including those who previously had limited access to the public sphere (e.g., Gripsrud, 2017; Schäfer, 2015). As a communication structure, the digital public sphere is extensive, complex, diverse, and fragmented. Given the wide range of different actors that are involved and the numerous arenas in which civic engagement takes place online, it is thus more accurate to speak of multiple public spheres or publics rather than a singular and homogenous digital public sphere (Breese, 2011; Schäfer, 2015). This can, of course, contribute to the democratisation of public debates (Dahlberg, 2001; Papacharissi, 2004; Ruiz et al., 2011).

Over the last few years, however, there has been growing concern and extensive research into various undemocratic and exclusionary communication practices, including the proliferation of hostility and hate, and how such content can and should be dealt with (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2018; Coe et al., 2014; European Commission, 2016; Gillespie, 2018; Iginio et al., 2015; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021; Singer, 2011). Hate speech against minorities appears to be widespread, which is a democratic problem because it can create feelings of fear and exclusion, discourage people from expressing their opinions and lead them to withdraw from public participation (e.g., Awan & Zempi, 2016; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Nadim, 2023). Overall, the literature shows that a growing number of new actors are involved in both pushing and drawing the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate speech. However, depending on the specific digital platform and actor in question there are different normative ideals and views of what is acceptable and unacceptable, which means that the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate content can be perceived and dealt with in different ways. In any case, minorities seem to be at high risk of experiencing prejudiced and hateful boundary violations.

A key challenge is that even when it is established that racist and other types of abusive content are unacceptable, research has indicated that the boundaries can be blurry and it is not necessarily clear what constitutes hate speech and how to identify it (Paasch-Colberg & Strippel, 2022; Singer, 2011). This also applies to antisemitism which, because of its moral illegitimacy, is often characterised by ambiguity and coded language (e.g., Wodak, 2015). Moreover, debates about antisemitism are often contentious and characterised by controversy, both because there is widespread agreement that it is unacceptable to promote and support such views, and because there are different understandings of exactly what antisemitism is (e.g., Waxman et al., 2022). The boundaries of what constitutes antisemitic hate speech are particularly difficult and disputed in the often polarised and politicised discussions about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020).

The term “boundaries” is extensive and fluid and has been used widely across the social sciences to address questions about inclusion, exclusion, power, inequality, and morality (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Pachucki et al., 2007). This thesis shows how the concept can be useful in studies of hate speech in the digital public sphere, particularly in illuminating how the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate speech is not fixed, and how many different actors contribute to boundary-making across a variety of digital media platforms.

A starting point for the thesis is that how the discursive boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are challenged, perceived and drawn, or not drawn, has consequences for the legitimacy of those who facilitate public participation and debate online - and for those who are the targets of hate speech (e.g., Anderson et al., 2016; Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Gillespie, 2018; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021). Ultimately, this can also have implications for democracy, as how such boundaries are set in the digital public sphere can contribute to both creating and challenging structural boundaries between groups (Alexander, 2006; Enjolras, 2017; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Furthermore, examining how relevant media actors, political organisations and Jews relate to antisemitic hate speech in digital media, a phenomenon that is widely regarded as illegitimate, is important because it can also shed light on the broader dynamics of the (digital) public sphere. Consequently, this thesis is guided by the following overarching research question:

> *How do understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere?*

Using antisemitism as an example, the overall ambition is to shed light on how boundaries are pushed, drawn, and experienced by different actors through a variety of media practices in the Norwegian digital public sphere. This overarching question is explored through three more specific research questions:

1) How is antisemitic hate speech expressed by different actors in the Norwegian digital public sphere?
2) How do relevant political actors perceive, experience and deal with antisemitic hate speech?
3) How do Jews perceive, experience and deal with antisemitic hate speech, and what are the consequences for those targeted?

In other words, while the thesis is mostly concerned with how the *symbolic* boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are challenged, perceived, and drawn by different actors, it also addresses questions about experiences of boundary violations and whether and how antisemitic hate speech functions as a *social* boundary for Jews who are exposed and targeted (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

The Norwegian context is interesting because although there is a broad political consensus that antisemitism must be combated, there has nevertheless been controversy about its boundaries (see e.g., Hoffmann & Moe, 2020; Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and

Modernisation, 2021; Simonsen, 2023). It is also worth noting that the Jewish minority in Norway is one of the smallest in Europe, estimated to be around 1,500 people in a population of around 5.4 million.

Conceptualising antisemitic hate speech

Although antisemitism is a contested concept and phenomenon, there is broad consensus among scholars about its core characteristics and that it refers to prejudice, hostility, and discrimination against Jews (because they are Jews), which can manifest itself in various ways, i.e. as attitudes, utterances, and actions (e.g., Benz, 2004; Fein, 1987; Hoffmann & Moe, 2020). In this thesis, the term "antisemitic hate speech" is used to describe various types of antisemitic discursive practices in digital media, including prejudiced, hostile, discriminatory, and (primarily negative) generalising statements and expressions about Jews, which may be directed at (presumed) Jewish individuals or Jews as a group, or refer to "the Jews" or "Jewishness" as an abstract category. Throughout the thesis, terms such as "online antisemitism" and "antisemitic discourse" are sometimes also used to describe this phenomenon.

To be clear, although the term "hate speech" can be understood in a legal sense, it is used here to refer to a wider range of anti-Jewish discursive practices that may or may not fall under hate speech legislation, but which nonetheless constitute an exclusionary message about Jews. This is in line with a socio-political approach to the study of hate speech, which regards hate speech against minorities and its regulation as embedded in political, social and cultural processes that also take place outside the legal arena in a given national context (see Maussen & Grillo, 2014: 2-4).

The understanding of antisemitism on which this thesis is based recognises that it can be communicated explicitly or implicitly. As linguist Ruth Wodak (2015: 100) has emphasised, "Antisemitic language behaviour […] covers a wide range of speech acts, ranging from explicit remarks or appeals for action to mere allusions". Consequently, it is also important to consider the context in which statements are expressed. The thesis also recognises that antisemitic hate speech can come from a variety of sources and can be expressed with or without an antisemitic intent, although in many cases this can be difficult to determine, particularly based on individual statements in digital media (see also Gidley et al., 2020; Waxman et al., 2022). These issues are discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Overview of articles

The thesis is based on four qualitative empirical case studies, which together provide different insights into the overall research question of how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. Below is an overview of the articles and their publication status (see Table 1), as well as a brief summary of each article.

Table 1. Overview of articles and publication status

	Title	Co-author	Journal	Publication status
1	Recontextualising the news: How antisemitic discourses are constructed in extreme far-right alternative media	Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk	*Nordicom Review*	Published
2	Freedom of expression or censorship of antisemitic hate speech? Editorial and audience perspectives on comment moderation in far-right alternative media		*Journalistica*	Published
3	Comment moderation as boundary-work: How left-wing political organisations deal with antisemitic hate speech in online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict		*Nordicom Review*	In review
4	Overcoming hate: Jewish minority voices' strategies for participating in the news media		*Journalism Practice*	Published

The first article explores how the neo-Nazi organisation *Nordic Resistance Movement* pushes the boundaries of what can be said about Jews by producing and promoting antisemitic news on its website. The news stories are based on and mimic legitimate news sources but are manipulated to both convey and conceal an overall antisemitic message, meaning that the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate content are deliberately blurred.

The second and third articles examine how far-right alternative media and left-wing political organisations respectively draw boundaries and perform boundary-work through comment moderation of antisemitic hate speech on their digital media platforms. The second article focuses specifically on how the editorial staff of three prominent far-right alternative media sites, which consider themselves to be against antisemitism, perceive and deal with the dilemma between defending free speech and denouncing antisemitic hate speech in their

comment sections, and how their audiences respond to this issue. The third article focuses on how left-wing political organisations, which generally consider themselves to be anti-racist, conduct comment moderation in online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular how they perceive and experience the contested boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate (antisemitic) criticism of Israel, and how this affects their moderation practices.

The fourth article examines experiences of boundary violations among Norwegian "public Jews". Specifically, the study explores their strategies for participating in the news media as visible minority voices, including how they perceive, are affected by, and overcome experiences of antisemitic hate speech in digital media.

Overall, the thesis contributes to media studies by proposing an analytical framework for how the concepts of boundaries and boundary-making can be used to understand different dimensions and dynamics of the digital public sphere, which revolve around processes of inclusion and exclusion of political opinions and expressions on the one hand, and minorities on the other. Furthermore, by applying this framework and taking a qualitative and holistic methodological approach to the study of antisemitic hate speech in digital media, focusing on content, countermeasures and consequences, the thesis also contributes to the multidisciplinary bodies of literature on antisemitism and online hate speech respectively.

Thesis outline

The introductory part of the thesis, also known as the "kappe", consists of six chapters. Following this first chapter, Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of relevant literature, including previous research on hate in digital media, and the literature on antisemitism in general and online antisemitism in particular, as well as studies on contemporary antisemitism in the Norwegian context. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. Combining a sociological perspective on boundaries with perspectives from media studies, antisemitism studies, and interdisciplinary research on (online) hate, the chapter proposes a framework for understanding boundary-making in the digital public sphere. Chapter 4 discusses the research design and the methodological approaches on which the thesis is based. Chapter 5 provides a more comprehensive summary of each of the four articles, including their main findings and individual arguments. Chapter 6 presents the overarching main findings and discusses the implications and contributions of the thesis. Finally, after the introductory part of the thesis, the articles are presented.

2 Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of the various bodies of research literature relevant to the thesis. First, the chapter briefly summarises the diverse research on online hate, while also indicating that this literature is concerned with different kinds of boundaries and boundary-making practices. Second, the multidisciplinary literature on antisemitism in general and studies on online antisemitism in particular are presented, specifically to show that antisemitism is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon with historical roots. As the empirical focus of this thesis is on antisemitism in Norway, previous research addressing this specific context is also reviewed, with a special focus on (public) manifestations of antisemitism over the last two decades. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the knowledge gaps and the main contributions of this thesis, which point to the value of studying both hate speech in general and antisemitic in particular, from a boundary perspective.

Research on online hate

Research on online hate is extensive and continually growing, and the phenomenon has been studied in a variety of academic disciplines, including sociology, criminology, computer science, and various sub-disciplines of media and communication studies such as political communication, internet studies and journalism studies. Across the disciplines, the literature can be broadly divided into three main categories, depending on whether the studies focus primarily on the *content*, *countermeasures,* or *consequences* of online hate. In other words, and as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, research on online hate can be said to be about boundaries in the digital public sphere, specifically about how discursive boundaries are pushed and drawn by different actors and across a variety of different platforms, and the implications of boundary violations (i.e., the spread of hate) - for those who are targeted and for society more broadly.

First of all, numerous studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have explored the prevalence and characteristics of hateful and racist content across a wide range of digital media. Since the 1990s, scholars have examined the websites, social media, and online communication practices of right-wing extremist actors, organisations, and movements, particularly in the US and Europe, to show how digital platforms enable the spread of hate ideologies (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Askanius, 2021b, 2021a; Askanius & Keller, 2021; Atton, 2006; Back et al., 1996; Caiani & Parenti, 2009, 2016; Cammaerts, 2009; Daniels, 2009a; Ekman, 2014; Gerstenfeld et al., 2003; Haanshuus & Jupskås, 2017; McSwiney et al., 2021; Nikunen et al., 2021). It is also well-established that hateful discourses about

immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities thrive in various types of online discussion forums established by or associated with the extreme and the radical right (e.g., Bowman-Grieve, 2009; Daniels, 2009b; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Ekman, 2019; Gaudette et al., 2021; Jasser et al., 2021; Rieger et al., 2021; Tuters & Hagen, 2020).

Many studies have also addressed questions about the prevalence of hate speech and other types of hostile content in mainstream online debates, particularly in newspaper comment sections and on major social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (e.g., Awan, 2014; Coe et al., 2014; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Ksiazek, 2018; Matamoros-Fernández, 2017; Paasch-Colberg et al., 2021; Santana, 2015). In recent years, research has also focused on developing methods to automatically detect hate speech in different digital contexts (Burnap & Williams, 2015; Laaksonen et al., 2020; Lingiardi et al., 2020; Mondal et al., 2017). Across platforms and regardless of whether the online community in question is considered mainstream or extreme, research has shown that hate speech is not always explicit and how prejudice, hate and racism can be expressed through deceptive digital formats, coded language, humour, insinuations, and memes (Åkerlund, 2022; Askanius, 2021b; Ben-David & Fernández, 2016; Daniels, 2009a; Farkas et al., 2018; Matamoros-Fernández, 2017). This means that the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate (hateful) speech can be blurred and subject to different interpretations. The question of how hate is often implicitly communicated is also highly relevant to this thesis and is discussed further in the next chapter as part of the theoretical framework.

A second strand of the literature has been concerned with how to reduce and prevent online hate speech and other types of abusive and undemocratic content (e.g., incivility and harassment) through different types of countermeasures. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this can be understood as boundary-drawing or boundary-work. Measures that have been proposed to prevent hate speech include awareness-raising campaigns, counter-narratives, education and platform regulation (e.g., Iginio et al. 2015; Silverman et al. 2016; Poole, Giraud, and de Quincey 2021; Kohl 2022). Of particular relevance to this thesis is the research on content and comment moderation. With the rise of social media platforms and comment sections as arenas for public participation and debate, a variety of different actors have been given the power and responsibility to control such discussions and to counter harmful content. Multiple studies have shown how moderation has been carried out, with varying degrees of success, by social media platforms (Gillespie, 2018; Roberts, 2019), news organisations and journalists (e.g., Reich 2011; Singer 2011; Hille and Bakker 2014; Ihlebæk

and Krumsvik 2015; Boberg et al. 2018), political actors and parties (Edwards, 2002; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Wright, 2006), and volunteers (e.g., Malinen 2022).

Although research has suggested that the boundaries between what is considered legitimate and illegitimate content are both context-dependent and often not clear-cut, few studies have focused specifically on moderators' understandings of such boundaries and how ambiguous content is handled. A notable exception is Paasch-Colberg and Strippel's (2022) recent study of how comment moderators representing German news organisations view and respond to hate comments, which concluded that it is often the case that the boundaries are blurred, which in turn influences their moderation practices.

Finally, a third but less comprehensive strand of the literature has focused on the consequences of online hate. In this context, it is useful to distinguish between studies that focus primarily on consequences at the macro (society, democracy), meso (specific groups) or micro level (individuals). For example, particularly within social psychology, there are studies on the effects of exposure to online hate in the general populations of different countries, which suggest that being exposed to hate (but not necessarily targeted) is associated with higher levels of perceived societal fear (Oksanen et al., 2020), higher levels of prejudice, and less empathy for the victim groups (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Soral et al., 2018). Furthermore, criminological research has suggested that an increase in hate rhetoric targeting a particular group can lead to a corresponding increase in hate crimes committed against them (Akca et al., 2020).

Despite great concern about the harms of online hate, few studies have addressed questions about the consequences of hate for the individuals and groups targeted (see Bliuc et al. 2018; Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas 2021). However, some studies of ethnic and religious minorities' experiences of hate speech, both online and offline, have shown that it can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including fear, pain, and vulnerability, as well as feelings of disempowerment, silencing and exclusion from society (e.g., Awan and Zempi 2016; Gelber and McNamara 2016). Research into experiences of online racism has also shed light on how young adults cope with and respond to identity-based harassment and hate (Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019, 2021a). Overall, this shows that online hate speech is harmful in many ways and that it can contribute to the creation or maintenance of inequality and boundaries between groups, but also that there is a potential for resistance. In general, these issues deserve more scholarly attention, and from a media studies perspective, there is a particular need to explore how experiences of different forms of hate speech affect the

participation of different groups in the (digital) public sphere (see also Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017).

Since the focus of this thesis is on antisemitism, which is a specific type of hate speech, the next section provides an overview of the extensive literature on prejudice and hate against Jews, which is a diverse phenomenon and research field with deep historical roots.

Antisemitism as a phenomenon and research field: Multifaceted with historical roots

The literature on antisemitism is extensive, and to a large extent, historically oriented. Although the focus of this thesis is not on history, it is important to know certain key aspects of the history of antisemitism to understand contemporary antisemitism and its characteristics. The term "antisemitism" was first popularised by the German journalist and self-proclaimed antisemite Wilhelm Marr in the late 1870s and used to describe a socio-political, nationalist, and racist movement that attributed negative social trends to Jewish influence and thus mobilised against the Jews. A few decades later, these ideas were strengthened by the rise of Nazism. Although the term was originally used to describe this particular historical period and justification for hatred of Jews, it is also commonly used to describe both older and newer forms of prejudice and hostility, including religiously motivated anti-Judaism, which was particularly widespread in the Middle Ages, and the various anti-Jewish manifestations that (still) exist after 1945 (Eriksen et al., 2005).

Like the phenomenon itself, the vast literature on prejudice and hostility towards Jews is diverse and deeply rooted in history. Emerging in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, academic research on antisemitism has been particularly concerned with and characterised by historical perspectives on Nazism and the persecution of Jews in Europe (e.g., Burrin 2005; Herf 2005; 2006; Cesarani 2016), the change and continuity of anti-Jewish ideas from antiquity to the present day (Bachner, 1999; Chazan, 1997; Eriksen et al., 2005; Laqueur, 2006; Wistrich, 1991, 1999), and social psychological and sociological perspectives on why people hold anti-Jewish attitudes (Adorno et al., 2019; Bergmann, 1992, 2008; Elias, 2001; Fein, 1987b; Jaspal, 2023; Kressel & Kressel, 2016). In addition, antisemitism has also been studied in academic disciplines such as theology, religious studies, cultural studies, and linguistics (for reviews, see Benz 2004; Bergmann and Körte 2004; Judaken 2021). As is shown later in this chapter, research has also been concerned with how antisemitic ideas are communicated.

To briefly summarise, previous research has shown that throughout history Jews have been perceived and portrayed as foreigners, and accused of being greedy, disloyal, and a destructive force in society, thus acting as scapegoats who have been blamed for a variety of religious, political, economic, and societal grievances, particularly in Europe but also elsewhere. Conspiracy theories have also been a key feature of antisemitism in different periods. As the historian Kjetil Braut Simonsen (2020a: 357) has pointed out, although the character and function of anti-Jewish thoughts and actions have changed over time, "the representation of the Jew as an evil and disruptive figure, equipped with almost unlimited power, has been a recurrent feature of both premodern, religious anti-Judaism and modern national and racist antisemitism". Simonsen (2020a: 367) has further argued that antisemitism is a flexible prejudice with some persistent traits, which has been "rearticulated and reshaped in different historical, ideological, and social circumstances". The most horrific example of conspiratorial and violent antisemitism, which is what people often associate with the term, is the rise of Nazism and the subsequent persecution and systematic mass murder of about six million Jews across Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

After the Holocaust, antisemitism has been perceived as illegitimate and immoral in liberal democratic societies, and (overt) expressions of such views have therefore been discredited and largely excluded from the public sphere and mainstream politics (e.g., Bergmann and Erb 1986; Bachner 1999). This does not mean that antisemitism has disappeared. Quantitative surveys have shown that certain generalising and prejudiced anti-Jewish attitudes are still relatively widespread. To illustrate, according to the ADL Global 100 antisemitism index, 35 per cent of the population in Western Europe supports the claim that "Jews have too much power in the business world", and 28 per cent believe that "Jews have too much control over global affairs" (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). Furthermore, in a large-scale survey among Jews in the European Union, 28 per cent reported that they have experienced antisemitic harassment in the past year (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018: 47).

Turning to the main characteristics of contemporary antisemitism, studies have shown that while many of the old, prejudiced, and hostile ideas about Jews have persisted after the Holocaust, some new ideological elements have emerged, notably Holocaust denial and distortion (Lipstadt, 2016) and Israel-related antisemitism (e.g., Bachner 1999; Dencik and Marosi 2016). While Holocaust denial and distortion imply that Jews have invented or exaggerated the genocide for their own gain, Israel-related antisemitism is about blaming

Jews for the policies and actions of the State of Israel, or that opposition to Israel is based on or draws on antisemitic stereotypes and ideas. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated how antisemitism is currently promoted by a variety of different actors and groups, particularly within some parts of the far right (e.g., Botsch and Kopke 2014; Wodak 2015; Simonsen 2020b) and the political left (Gidley et al., 2020; Hirsh, 2018; Rich, 2018), by Islamists (Rickenbacher, 2019) and in certain Muslim communities (Jikeli, 2015).

Another key feature of contemporary antisemitism is that because there is widespread agreement that antisemitism is an illegitimate political position, actors who publicly promote such views often present them as something else, particularly if they wish to reach a wider audience and avoid sanctions. Studies have shown how antisemitic ideas and Holocaust denial have been communicated publicly in subtle ways, particularly by far-right actors who use insinuations, humour, and other types of implicit and coded language (Botsch & Kopke, 2014; Boudana, 2018; Engel & Wodak, 2013; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001b; Stoegner, 2018). As for the political left, a key question in the literature on contemporary antisemitism is when and how – usually left-wing – opposition to Israel constitutes an antisemitic message (Hirsh, 2018; Judaken, 2008; Klug, 2003, 2005; Marcus, 2015). First of all, this is complicated because there is disagreement among scholars and in the public about where the exact line between legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel should be drawn. Second, research has suggested that antisemitism in general can be difficult to recognise, regardless of whether it comes from the right or the left (Waxman et al., 2022). This also means that antisemitic tropes can be reproduced and promoted by actors who initially do not have an antisemitic intention (Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020). Overall, this shows that the boundaries between legitimate speech and antisemitic hate speech can be both blurred and contested, which will be discussed more in the next chapter.

Finally, another key feature of contemporary antisemitism is that it seems to have become particularly widespread and visible on the internet and in social media, which is also the starting point and topic of this thesis. The next section provides an overview of previous studies on online antisemitism.

Cross-disciplinary research on online antisemitism

According to a transnational survey of more than 16.000 Jews in the European Union on their experiences and perceptions of antisemitism, 89 per cent of respondents perceived antisemitism on the internet and social media as a problem, making the online sphere the presumed key arena for manifestations of antisemitism today. Furthermore, when asked

whether the problem of online antisemitism had increased, stayed the same or decreased over the past five years, 88 per cent of respondents said they perceived it to have increased. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018: 22-23). This shows that online antisemitism is a major concern for European Jews. Compared to other types of online hate (e.g., anti-Muslim hate speech), it has received less scholarly attention. However, while the phenomenon was understudied for a long time, academic research on online antisemitism has increased in recent years.

Previously, it was mainly non-governmental organisations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the US and the Community Security Trust (CST) in the UK that monitored and reported on online antisemitism as part of their annual reports on antisemitic incidents (for recent reports, see Anti-Defamation League 2023; Community Security Trust 2023). Within the interdisciplinary field of antisemitism studies, there is now widespread agreement that research into antisemitic hate speech in digital media is crucial to understanding contemporary antisemitism. Several of the studies that have been published in recent years have therefore been conducted by scholars with particular knowledge of antisemitism (e.g., Wodak 2015; Schwarz-Friesel 2018a; 2019; Becker 2021; Jikeli et al. 2022). More recently, research has also been carried out by scholars with other types of academic expertise, particularly in computational methods and big data analysis (e.g., Ozalp et al. 2020; Tuters and Hagen 2020; Zannettou et al. 2020; Chandra et al. 2021; Riedl et al. 2022).

As with research on online hate in general, the majority of studies on online antisemitism have focused on analysing antisemitic *content*, either on one specific platform or across a range of digital platforms. The first comprehensive research project was carried out by the German cognitive linguist Monika Schwarz-Friesel and her team, who have been using mixed-method corpus analysis to study the scope and linguistic characteristics of different types of antisemitic speech in German-language online forums for many years (see e.g., Schwarz-Friesel 2018a; 2018b; 2019). Before this, academic research on online antisemitism was mainly covered by more general studies of far-right actors and online communities (e.g., Back, Keith, and Solomos 1996; Weitzman 2001; Daniels 2009). This is still partly the case (see e.g., Askanius 2021a; Askanius and Keller 2021; Jasser et al. 2021).

In recent years, a significant number of quantitative studies have examined mostly English-language antisemitic content on major social media platforms such as Twitter (Ozalp et al., 2020; Seijbel, van Sterkenburg, & Spaaij, 2022), YouTube (Allington et al., 2020) and TikTok (Weimann & Masri, 2021), as well as subcultural online communities such as 4chan,

specifically the /pol/ board, and Gab (Tuters and Hagen 2020; Zannettou et al. 2020). Within this line of research, studies have also attempted to use supervised machine learning to detect antisemitic hate speech on different digital platforms. A key finding of these studies is antisemitism is not very prevalent compared to other types of content (Chandra et al., 2021; Jikeli et al., 2019, 2022; Kaati et al., 2021; Ozalp et al., 2020). In addition, many of these studies have combined large-scale quantitative analysis with (some) qualitative analysis of smaller content samples to investigate in more detail the characteristics of the antisemitic hate speech found more closely (e.g., Guhl 2022; Riedl et al. 2022).

While quantitative studies are useful for measuring the prevalence of certain antisemitic words, statements, and ideas (often based on deductive keyword searches), they do not capture all the different and more implicit forms of antisemitism, which need to be interpreted with (more) nuance and context. As emphasised by antisemitism scholar Günther Jikeli and colleagues in their paper on annotating antisemitic online content, those who assess such content should be highly trained to understand the definition of antisemitism, knowledgeable about other topics discussed on the platform in question, and "perhaps most importantly, diligent and detail-oriented, including with regard to embedded links and the context" (Jikeli, Cavar, and Miehling 2019: 18). A similar argument has also been made by Becker and Trocke (2023: 335-336), who have argued that since antisemitic ideas are communicated through an enormous spectrum of language use patterns, both at the word and sentence level, this "spectrum of linguistic variations of meaning – among them the dominant field of implicit patterns – has to be taken into consideration to be able to make reliable statements about the actual presence of antisemitism online".

Within the literature on online antisemitic content, several studies have used different types of qualitative approaches focusing on antisemitic discourses and narratives, thus considering and capturing the implicit ways in which antisemitism can be articulated in different digital contexts. For example, studies have shown how antisemitism is promoted through the use of humour, particularly on websites and forums associated with the extreme right (Askanius, 2021b; Weaver, 2013, 2015). Research has also illustrated how radical and populist right-wing actors have published antisemitic caricatures on their official Facebook pages to discredit their political opponents (Hübscher, 2020; Wodak, 2015a). These studies have further highlighted the need for knowledge of how Jews have been historically portrayed to determine why the subtle caricatures are antisemitic.

Moreover, recent research has demonstrated how antisemitic ideas are both explicitly and implicitly expressed in digital media associated with the political left, particularly in discussions related to Israel, for example by claiming or insinuating that "some Jews" fit the description of traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes (e.g., powerful and rich) (Allington, 2018) or in comparisons of Israel and Nazi Germany (Becker, 2021). Some studies have also shown that antisemitic ideas are present in the online propaganda of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hendelman-Baavur, 2019) and the terrorist organisation The Islamic State (ISIS) (Rickenbacher, 2019). While most of the studies of online antisemitism have focused on how such ideas are expressed by political actors or in the context of political debates, including in conspiratorial digital environments, research has also shown how explicit and implicit anti-Jewish slurs can occur in discussions about football (Seijbel, van Sterkenburg, & Oonk, 2022). The literature on online antisemitism reflects in many ways how antisemitism is a diverse phenomenon with historical roots. However, the research is still in an early phase.

In comparison to the extensive literature on various countermeasures to online hate speech in general, few studies have focused specifically on the reduction and prevention of antisemitic hate speech. Among the few exceptions are two studies that initially focused on identifying antisemitic content but also ended up shedding light on the use of counter-narratives (see Jikeli, Cavar, and Miehling 2019; Ozalp et al. 2020). Moreover, a study by Barak-Cheney and Saltiel (2022) has mapped the methods employed by civil society organisations to combat antisemitism on social media, including the development of software to automatically detect antisemitic hate speech, monitoring and reporting antisemitic content, counter-speech, and educational measures. Except for the above-mentioned quantitative survey of European Jews (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018), there is also limited knowledge about how online antisemitism is perceived and understood, both within the Jewish minority and in the wider public.

Finally, just as research on the experiences and consequences of online hate is limited, there is a lack of research on experiences of antisemitism in digital media. To date, there appears to be only one study that has focused specifically on the experiences of Jews and the impact of antisemitic hate speech in the online sphere. Based on a small sample of interviews with three young Jews, all of whom work for Jewish organisations, the study found that they have witnessed much antisemitism on social media and dealt with it in different ways (Czymmek, 2022).

As this thesis explores antisemitism in the Norwegian digital public sphere, the next section provides an overview of previous research from Norway, specifically the studies that have focused on manifestations of antisemitism in the last two decades.

Antisemitism in contemporary Norway

Research on antisemitism in Norway has largely been dominated by historical perspectives, especially on the variety of anti-Jewish ideas present in Norwegian society from the establishment of the state in 1814 to the interwar period (e.g., Moe and Kopperud 2011; Harket 2014; Snildal 2014; Lien 2015), and on the rise of Nazism and the persecution of Jews (e.g., Bruland, 2017; Corell, 2021; Hoffmann, 2020b; Simonsen, 2017, 2020c). Some historical studies have also looked at change and continuity in Norwegian antisemitism in the decades after 1945 (Simonsen, 2020d, 2023), including the emergence of Holocaust denial (Simonsen, 2019, 2021), left-wing antisemitism (Brekke 2023), and public debates and "the fading consensus" on how to define antisemitism (Hoffmann, 2020a).

When it comes to research on antisemitism in contemporary Norway, the literature is less extensive. However, since 2012, three comprehensive reports have been published on antisemitic attitudes among the Norwegian population (Hoffmann et al., 2012; Hoffmann & Moe, 2017; Moe, 2022). According to the most recent survey, 9.3 per cent of the general Norwegian population have prejudiced attitudes towards Jews (Moe, 2022). In the Muslim sample, 26.8 per cent have prejudiced attitudes towards Jews. Regarding other dimensions of negative attitudes, so-called social distance to and dislike of Jews, the figures are significantly lower in both samples, between 4 and 6 per cent. In the two most recent surveys (2017 and 2022), Jews' perspectives on and experiences of antisemitism in Norwegian society have also been mapped, albeit to a somewhat limited extent. Although negative attitudes towards Jews are not very widespread in Norway, and the figures have remained stable in recent years, this part of the survey shows that the Jewish minority perceives the situation to be worse now than before. In 2022, 81 per cent of the Jewish sample believed that negative attitudes towards Jews are "very" or "quite" widespread in Norway today, a clear increase from 59 per cent in 2017 (Moe 2022: 62). Furthermore, when asked whether negative attitudes towards Jews have become more or less widespread in Norway over the past five years, 68 per cent responded that they perceive such attitudes to be "more widespread" (Moe 2022: 64). In addition, 71 per cent of the Jewish sample said that they sometimes avoid showing their religious affiliation due to fear of negative attitudes, an increase from 61 per cent in 2017 (Moe 2022: 112).

This apparent gap between the low levels of negative attitudes towards Jews in the general population and the perceptions of increasing levels of antisemitism among Jews may at first seem paradoxical. However, it is important to bear in mind that while these surveys are a valuable tool for gaining knowledge about the levels of anti-Jewish attitudes in Norway, as well as Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism in particular social contexts, they do not provide answers to where or how such attitudes manifest themselves in the public realm. Consequently, it is important to examine this issue in more detail. However, there has been relatively little research on the current manifestations of antisemitism in the Norwegian public sphere. Among the few studies that have been done are Døving's (2016) study of prejudiced representations of Jews and Judaism in the Norwegian press between 2000 and 2012, and Lenz and Geelmuyden's (2020) analysis of the so-called Gaarder debate in 2006. In addition, research on the far-right political landscape has identified the Nordic Resistance Movement as a prominent organisation that spreads antisemitic ideas (Bjørgo & Gjelsvik, 2018; Døving & Emberland, 2018; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018; Haanshuus, 2018). However, except for Simonsen's (2020) study on the Norwegian far right and antisemitism from a contemporary historical perspective, this line of research has not focused specifically on hostile propaganda and hate speech targeting Jews.

In addition to these studies, as part of the Action Plans against Antisemitism (2016-2023), the Norwegian government has initiated and funded two so-called pilot studies aimed at mapping the presence and extent of antisemitism in the media in general and on the Internet in particular. First, in a pilot study on antisemitism in a selection of Norwegian media, historians Brustad and Lien (2016) used both quantitative and qualitative content analyses to show that negative and problematic statements about Jews exist in edited news media, their comment sections, and social media (i.e., Twitter). Overall, however, such content appears to be relatively uncommon, and most of the statements that drew on classic anti-Jewish stereotypes, as well as the most crude and explicit forms of antisemitism, were primarily found in the comment sections of online newspapers and social media. Consequently, Brustad and Lien (2016: 13) argued that "future research should thus focus on such media". Second, in a follow-up study on the characteristics and countermeasures of online antisemitism, which was based on expert interviews, identification of a selection of relevant online forums and an attempt at big data analysis, social scientists Brekke, Beyer and Enjolras (2019) identified different examples of antisemitism, particularly on far-right digital platforms, as well as in comment sections related to the far left and in conspiratorial online communities. However,

Brekke and colleagues (2019: 76) also concluded that their investigation should be viewed as a pilot study since it was "not dimensioned for providing complete answers neither when it comes to the extent of antisemitic statements, who the senders are nor what the content is".

Summary of knowledge gaps and main contributions

To sum up, there is extensive literature on both online hate and (historical) antisemitism. However, research on online antisemitism, which is a specific form of hate speech, is still limited. Consequently, there is a need for more fine-grained analyses of antisemitic content to understand the variety of ways in which antisemitism is expressed in the digital public sphere, especially considering that the boundaries can be both blurred and contested. More knowledge is also needed about different actors' understandings of antisemitism in the digital public sphere, in particular how this shapes countermeasures and the consequences of antisemitic hate speech for those targeted. This thesis takes a qualitative and holistic methodological approach to the study of antisemitic hate speech in the Norwegian digital public sphere. In addition to focusing on hateful and discriminatory content targeting Jews, including the nuances of how and in what contexts it occurs, the thesis also examines how key political actors perceive and deal with antisemitism on their digital media platforms, as well as the experiences and consequences of antisemitic hate speech for the Jewish minority.

While the empirical focus of the thesis is on antisemitic hate speech, this thesis also contributes to the literature on online hate more generally. First, by proposing that such a qualitative and holistic approach is needed to gain a deeper understanding of hate speech in the digital public sphere. This is important because, although research suggests that the boundaries between what is considered legitimate and illegitimate content are both context-dependent and often not clear-cut, few studies have focused specifically on perceptions of such boundaries and how ambiguous content is handled. More knowledge is also needed about the experiences and effects of online hate, specifically whether and how this contributes to inequality between groups. Second, this thesis proposes that the concepts of boundaries and boundary-making are theoretically and analytically useful for the study of hate speech because they can shed light on how the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate speech is not fixed, but subject to negotiation and contestation between different actors, and how such boundaries are drawn - or not drawn - can have consequences for inclusion and exclusion. This applies to research on hate speech in general, and antisemitic hate speech in particular, and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding boundary-making in the digital public sphere.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the overall theoretical framework of the thesis, which combines sociological boundary theory with perspectives from media studies, antisemitism studies and multidisciplinary research on (online) hate speech to propose a framework for understanding and analysing boundary-making in the digital public sphere. To understand how such boundary-making takes place, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of boundaries and how boundaries manifest themselves in different ways.

Boundaries and how they can manifest

The concept of boundaries is broad and comprehensive and has been used for many different purposes across the social sciences, particularly in sociology (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Pachucki et al., 2007). In general, the concept has been used to shed light on social processes of categorisation, relationality, and the inclusion and exclusion of people or practices - in particular parts of society or society as a whole. It is often also about power, inequality, identity and morality (see also Lamont & Fournier, 1992). Specifically, who has the power and resources to set boundaries (and who does not), why and under what conditions they are set, and what the consequences of these boundaries are at the group or societal level.

How boundaries are established and drawn is historically and culturally conditioned and can change over time. To illustrate, the Jewish minority has largely moved from exclusion to inclusion in (contemporary) liberal democratic societies (Alexander, 2006). At the same time, antisemitism has gone from being widespread in the past to being widely condemned today. Whether it is a question of who is included and excluded, or what is legitimate and illegitimate to express in the public sphere, such boundaries do not change by themselves but are the result of continuous conflict and power struggles between different social actors (Alexander, 2006; Midtbøen et al., 2017). The case of antisemitism is particularly interesting in this respect because, although there is a broad consensus that it is unacceptable to communicate such views, there is often controversy about what constitutes antisemitism and where the discursive boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews and "Jewishness" should be set (e.g., Hoffmann & Moe, 2020; Simonsen, 2023; Waxman et al., 2022). This is partly because antisemitism can be difficult to recognise, and partly because there are different perceptions of exactly what antisemitism is and where it comes from, especially when comparing the perspectives of the political right and left.

Within media studies, the boundary perspective has not been frequently used, at least not explicitly.[1] However, questions of who has power, the role of the media and the overall dynamics and structures of the public sphere have always been important to media scholars. For example, research on media representations of minorities has emphasised the crucial role of the media in reflecting and influencing the boundaries of who constitutes "us" and "them" (e.g., Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Bleich et al., 2015; Cottle, 2000; Eide & Nikunen, 2011; Fürsich, 2010; Luengo & Ihlebæk, 2019; van Dijk, 1991). Notably, in an extensive study of representations of Islam and Muslims in American newspapers, Bleich and van der Veen (2022: 142) have used boundary theory to characterise the media as "a key site for boundary-making" and to argue that the news media, through their choices, can "help define and reinforce boundaries" between the majority population and the Muslim minority (Bleich & van der Veen, 2022: 144)

This thesis argues that a boundary perspective is useful for media studies in general, and for the study of hate speech in digital media in particular, for two main reasons: First, to illuminate how the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate speech is neither clear-cut nor fixed but subject to negotiation and contestation between different actors in the digital public sphere (see also Midtbøen et al., 2017). Second, to shed light on how such boundaries are drawn, or not drawn, in digital media have consequences for inclusion and exclusion in society more broadly.

A sociological perspective on boundaries

In general, there are many different types of boundaries, which are manifested in various ways. Sociologists Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) have therefore suggested that it is theoretically and analytically useful to distinguish between what they have conceptualised as *symbolic* and *social* boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space". They are tools by which members of society "struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 168). Such conceptual distinctions can, for example, involve including some individuals or groups and excluding others based on certain criteria, often linked to various forms of identity markers such as gender, ethnicity, or religion. In the context of public participation and debates, symbolic boundaries are used by individuals and groups in struggles over what is perceived as legitimate and illegitimate positions and views

[1] The literature on the institutional and professional boundaries of journalism is an important exception (see e.g., Carlson & Lewis, 2015).

(Enjolras, 2017; Midtbøen et al., 2017). Symbolic boundaries are thus not static but can be subject to contestation, negotiation, and change.

While symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions and thus can be seen as abstract phenomena that exist at the intersubjective level, social boundaries are "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 168). For example, social boundaries exist when there is inequality between groups or when someone is excluded based on their identity. In the context of public participation, social boundaries are evident, for example, when certain groups or viewpoints are silenced or excluded from participating in public debates (Midtbøen et al., 2017). To illustrate, a study by Fladmoe and Nadim (2017) has suggested that hate speech may act as a social boundary to free speech, as it can discourage or cause people to withdraw from participating in online discussions.

Although symbolic and social boundaries manifest in different ways, Lamont and Molnár (2002: 169) have argued that they should be viewed as equally real and important to study, since symbolic boundaries can be thought of as "a necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of social boundaries". When symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon, they can take on a constraining character and influence social interaction. A similar argument about symbolic boundaries – or symbolic codes – and their influence on the inclusion and exclusion of different (minority) groups has also been proposed by cultural sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander in his theory of the civil sphere. Alexander (2006: 54) has specifically argued that it is necessary to study "the distinctive symbolic codes that are important in constituting the very sense of society for those who are within". In other words, discursive symbolic codes are crucial because they influence people's judgments about who should and should not be included as members of society, and thus they also influence how the civil (and public) sphere functions.

Following this line of thought, Enjolras (2017) has argued that the public sphere can be seen as a space for political conflict and struggles over recognition and power, as well as a space for solidarity and social integration because it is in this arena debates about and the shaping of the moral order of society and the boundaries of legitimate speech take place, which in turn influence the inclusion or exclusion of minority groups. While this thesis is mostly concerned with how the symbolic boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are challenged, perceived, and drawn by different actors in the digital public sphere, it

also addresses questions about experiences of boundary violations and how antisemitic hate speech functions as a social boundary for Jews who are exposed and targeted.

The boundaries of antisemitism

It is worth noting that there are certain legal, technological, and moral restrictions on what can be said about Jews without risking sanctions, which also shows how the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable speech can both interact and take different forms at the societal level.

First, boundaries can be formally manifested through law, and many liberal democratic societies have legal boundaries for how people can express themselves in public. After World War II, and particularly since the 1960s and 1970s, legislation against racist and hate speech was introduced and gradually extended across Europe (Bleich, 2011).[2] This is also the case in Norway, where the first law against racist speech was introduced in 1961 in response to the so-called swastika epidemic, a transnational wave of antisemitic graffiti and other hate crimes against Jews (Hoffmann, 2020a). The current legislation on hate speech, Section 185 of the Penal Code, states that it is a criminal offence to publicly make a discriminatory or hateful statement, which "with intent or gross negligence" is "threatening or insulting a person or promoting hate of, persecution of or contempt for another person based on their skin colour or national or ethnic origin, religion or life stance, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or reduced functional capacity" (Lovdata, 2021). This means that it is also illegal to express antisemitic hate speech in public. However, very few have been convicted of expressing such views. The common denominator of those who have been legally sanctioned is that they have all expressed very explicit hatred of Jews.[3]

Second, boundaries are also manifested through digital media platforms' power, policies, and practices. Although such restrictions are less formal than the law, digital platforms also set the boundaries for how people can express themselves in the (digital) public sphere. While the powerful role of gatekeeping public information and debate was once reserved for the established news media in a given national context, the media landscape has now become much wider and more fragmented (e.g., Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). This means that the boundaries of public debate and legitimate speech are now being set both by new actors and

[2] By contrast, the United States (US) has no such laws. For a discussion of the legal differences between European countries and the US, see Bleich (2011).

[3] According to an unpublished overview compiled for the research project HATECYCLE in which I am involved, there have only been seven cases since 2000. Many thanks to research assistant Kristina Os for her help in finding these cases.

in many more domains than before, and in this context, global platforms have a lot of power (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022; van Dijck et al., 2018). As van Dijck, Poell and de Waal have argued, this is because in the "platform society", platforms have become an "*integral* part of society, where conflicts of interest are currently played out at various levels" (van Dijck et al., 2018: 2). However, platforms are neither neutral nor value-free, and it is the combination of their technological affordances and values that determines how moderation is carried out (see also Gillespie, 2018; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021).

While values and norms vary between platforms, all digital platforms have, at least to some extent, a set of rules about what kind of content is and is not acceptable, and many of the major social media platforms prohibit hate speech (Gillespie, 2018). To illustrate, Facebook does not allow hate speech, which is defined as "a direct attack against people – rather than concepts or institutions" based on what they call protected characteristics, including "race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity and serious disease" (Facebook Community Standards, 2023). This also includes anti-Jewish rhetoric. Other key actors, such as political organisations or news organisations, can also have guidelines for the online debates they facilitate and apply sanctions against transgressive content, whether it takes place on Facebook or through other discussion forums such as the comment sections in online newspapers (e.g., Hille & Bakker, 2014; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021).

Third, boundaries are also informally manifested through social norms and what is considered to be morally acceptable in a given society. A central theory in the literature on contemporary antisemitism is that because of the moral condemnation of antisemitism after the Holocaust, explicit expressions of such attitudes and ideas have moved from the public sphere into less visible spheres - for example, right-wing extremist subcultures or the private sphere - or have taken other and more implicit forms. Sociologists Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb (1986) have conceptualised this as the "communication latency" of antisemitism. Originally used to explain the situation in post-war Western Germany, this concept has since been used in a number of different studies to emphasise the illegitimacy of antisemitic expressions in Western European public contexts (e.g., Bergmann & Heitmeyer, 2005; Botsch & Kopke, 2014; Hoffmann & Moe, 2020; Salzborn, 2011; Simonsen, 2023; Stoegner & Wodak, 2016).

A similar argument has also been made by historian of ideas Henrik Bachner (1999: 15) in his study on antisemitism in post-war Sweden: "With the capitulation of Nazi Germany and

with an increased insight into the nature and extent of the crimes committed against the Jews, a change in attitude towards antisemitism as a phenomenon followed in Western Europe". In general, "anti-Jewish and racist attitudes and ideas were tabooed", and according to Bachner, this "anti-antisemitic norm" resulted in antisemitic expressions becoming increasingly rare in the public debates of Western European democracies (ibid). However, as discussed in previous chapters, antisemitism has not been eradicated and digital media now appears to be the main arena for the spread of antisemitic hate speech (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018).

Because of the moral (and political) illegitimacy of antisemitism, very few would now admit that they support such views. Research has shown that when antisemitic ideas are communicated in the public sphere, it often leads to both scandalisation and denial, as well as heated discussions about interpretations and intentions (Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020; Simonsen, 2023; Waxman et al., 2022; Wodak, 2015a). This applies to all forms of antisemitism, whether it comes from the right or the left of the political spectrum, or anywhere else. In this context, it is also worth noting that debates can also be heated because they sometimes revolve around (false) accusations of antisemitism. In discussing the politicised nature of debates on antisemitism, Waxman, Schraub and Hosein (2022: 1804) have pointed out how "politicians of all stripes have accused their rivals of engaging in antisemitism, or at least tolerating it, and members of the public are now more prone to perceive and condemn when it comes from the other side of the political spectrum". Overall, this underlines that there is widespread agreement that antisemitism is morally unacceptable, but disagreement about what the problem is.

A starting point for this thesis is that despite the existence of these legal, platform-dependent, and moral boundaries against antisemitism, the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are neither fixed nor settled, especially online, where many different actors contribute to boundary-making on a variety of digital media platforms. The boundaries of the public sphere, whether symbolic or social, do not emerge or exist on their own but are created and contested through complex social processes involving different social actors (Midtbøen et al., 2017). The remaining sections of this chapter provide a framework for understanding how such boundary-making takes place in the digital public sphere.

Hate speech and boundary-making in the digital public sphere

It is well established that the rise of digital media has radically changed the conditions of access to and participation in the public sphere (e.g., Gripsrud et al., 2010; Papacharissi, 2002; Schäfer, 2015). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the digital public sphere consists of many different platforms and participatory services through which people can express themselves, giving many more individuals and political groups the power and opportunity to voice their opinions and engage in public debate, including those who previously had limited opportunities to do so. This in turn has led to concerns about the spread of hate speech and other types of offensive and harmful content, which are often seen as a threat to democracy and the reputation of the digital platform and media actor in question (e.g., Anderson et al., 2016; European Commission, 2016; Gillespie, 2018).

Consequently, the digitalisation of the public sphere has also led to more and new actors being given and taking responsibility for managing the online discussions they facilitate on political issues and other matters of public interest (e.g., Gillespie, 2018; Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Malinen, 2021; Singer, 2011). However, regulation of hate speech is not always carried out or is not always successful. For people who spend a lot of time online, hate speech can therefore seem ubiquitous. This means that minorities can easily be exposed to and targeted by hateful content, and thus forced to deal with it in different ways (Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019).

This thesis suggests that all of these processes - which characterise the digital public sphere - can be studied from a boundary perspective, specifically as boundary-making in the digital public sphere. Boundary-making is used here as an overarching concept, indicating that these processes should be seen as (discursive) power struggles in which many different actors are involved in shaping legitimate and illegitimate speech (symbolic boundaries), which in turn can affect the inclusion or exclusion of minority groups (social boundaries) (see also Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Midtbøen et al., 2017). This thesis further proposes that boundary-making in the digital public sphere can be studied along three analytical dimensions: First, by focusing on how some actors *push boundaries* by expressing hate speech against minorities in certain ways. Second, by investigating how other actors *draw boundaries* to reduce and prevent hateful content in the digital public sphere. Third, by exploring *experiences of boundary violations* and how those who are exposed and targeted deal with and are affected by hate speech. The following sections discuss these analytical dimensions in more detail.

Pushing boundaries

Given the widespread agreement that hate speech in general, and antisemitism in particular, is considered illegitimate and unacceptable, expressions of antisemitic hate speech can be seen as a way of pushing and contesting the boundaries of legitimate speech in the digital public sphere (see also Enjolras, 2017). This can be done by a variety of actors, in a variety of ways, and on a variety of digital media platforms.

As also discussed in the previous chapter, the extensive literature on hate in digital media has shown that hateful and racist content is produced and promoted by a range of different actors, particular political groups with exclusionary ideologies (especially right-wing extremists) or individuals who do not necessarily represent a specific ideology or group (see also Bliuc et al., 2018). Furthermore, while expressions of online hate speech are sometimes overt, they can also be ambiguous and characterised by different types of covert language, including humour and insinuations, or disguised through deceptive digital formats (Åkerlund, 2022; Askanius, 2021b; Daniels, 2009a; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Paasch-Colberg & Strippel, 2022; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001a; Wodak, 2015b). This is also true for antisemitic hate speech. Studies have shown how antisemitic ideas can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly, whether online or offline, and that actors with different ideological affiliations, both far right and far left, use a variety of discursive strategies to conceal their antisemitic message (Becker & Troschke, 2023; Botsch & Kopke, 2014; Engel & Wodak, 2013; Wodak, 2015a).

Furthermore, as briefly mentioned in the literature review, research has also indicated that antisemitism can be expressed intentionally or unintentionally (from the sender's point of view) by actors representing or affiliated with both the far right and the (far) left political landscape (e.g., Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020; Waxman et al., 2022). Discussing the issue of intention in the context of the antisemitism crisis within the Labour Party in the UK, Gidley, McGeever and Feldman (2020: 416) have argued that antisemitism, in general, should be viewed as "a deep reservoir of stereotypes and narratives", which have "accumulated over centuries and are deeply embedded within our culture". This means that anyone without knowledge and awareness of antisemitic tropes can express antisemitic ideas - for example, about Jewish power or viciousness - without intending to do so. However, unless the sender has an explicit and consistent antisemitic ideology, it is difficult to determine their intentions. The understanding of antisemitism on which this thesis is based recognises that statements still constitute an antisemitic message – or at least have antisemitic connotations – if they

generalise Jews and/or draw on (historical) anti-Jewish stereotypes, tropes, and ideas. Furthermore, it is often crucial to analyse the context to determine whether a particular statement is antisemitic or not (Wodak, 2015a).

Recognising that antisemitism can come from a variety of sources and can be difficult to identify, this thesis examines how and by whom antisemitic hate speech is expressed on the digital media platforms of a variety of different actors, including both far-right alternative media and left-wing political organisations. A distinction is made between those actors and digital platforms that have antisemitism as a central part of their ideology (i.e., neo-Nazis) and those that oppose antisemitism but have to deal with individuals who express antisemitic hate speech in their comment sections. To get a more complete picture of how and by whom antisemitic hate speech is expressed in the Norwegian digital public sphere, this is also explored by asking Norwegian Jews about their specific experiences of online antisemitism.

Drawing boundaries

Concerns about the spread of hate speech and other types of problematic content have led many actors to take responsibility for moderating content on their digital platforms, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter. From a boundary perspective, all kinds of countermeasures against hate speech can be understood as contributing to drawing the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech in the digital public sphere. While "drawing boundaries" thus can be seen as a complex process involving many different actors and measures, this thesis (i.e., article 3) also suggests that the related concept of "boundary-work" is useful for illuminating specific actors' understandings of their role as moderators, their perceptions of where the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech should be set, and how this affects their moderation practices. This type of boundary-work can also be seen as a way of protecting boundaries and the legitimacy of the actors in question (see also Braunstein, 2018; Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Gieryn, 1983).

Many studies have shown how social media platforms, news organisations and journalists, political actors and others act as powerful gatekeepers, moderating content and comments to reduce hate speech and other types of harmful expressions (e.g., Boberg et al., 2018; Chen & Pain, 2017; Edwards, 2002; Gillespie, 2018; Hille & Bakker, 2014; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Roberts, 2019; Singer, 2011). Depending on the actor, platform, and socio-political context, moderation can be carried out for legal, moral, strategic and/or commercial reasons. While the emergence of social media and other types of participatory services has given people more power to participate in discussions about politics and society, those who facilitate and

moderate public information change, participation and debates still have considerable power in shaping and setting the boundaries of what can be expressed in the digital public sphere (see also Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015)

Content and comment moderation can be carried out in different ways, for example, by evaluating content before it is published (pre-moderation), by removing published content and banning debaters (post-moderation), or by actively participating in the debate (e.g., Boberg et al., 2018; Chen & Pain, 2017; Gillespie, 2018; Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Reich, 2011). Exactly how this is done will be dependent, among other things, on the technological affordances of the platform in question (Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021). Furthermore, how the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable content are perceived also plays a crucial role in how moderation is practised.

A key challenge is that there is no universal answer as to where to draw the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech. Previous research has illustrated how online discussion forums can be "anarchic" or more or less regulated, depending on whether those facilitating such discussions have a liberal or restrictive approach to content moderation, and what ideals should shape the debate (e.g., Ihlebæk et al., 2013; Jensen, 2003; Løvlie et al., 2018; Wright, 2006). While some emphasise the importance of deliberative quality, others emphasise that online debates should be a free marketplace of ideas and thus free from censorship.

Studies have demonstrated how established newspapers and political parties are commonly concerned with reducing aggressive and hateful speech, thereby increasing the deliberative quality of online debates (e.g., Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Stroud et al., 2015). This is seen as a way of ensuring that more people feel included in public debate. However, being too restrictive can also lead to participants feeling that they are being censored and excluded (Løvlie et al., 2018). In more alternative online forums, freedom of expression may be a more important democratic value than protecting minorities against hate speech and preventing other types of abusive content (e.g., Åkerlund, 2023). How the boundaries are drawn is likely to vary depending on the digital platform and the political position of the actors in question, i.e., whether they are part of the "mainstream" public and politics or can be characterised as "alternative" or as counterpublics (e.g., Downey & Fenton, 2003; Holt et al., 2019; Jackson & Kreiss, 2023). This thesis explores how boundaries are drawn both in far-right alternative media and among a wide range of left-wing political actors, most of whom can be described as part of mainstream politics.

Another key challenge is that even when it is established that hate speech is unacceptable, it is not always easy to determine what constitutes hate speech. A study by Singer (2011: 129) has demonstrated that even if news organisations have guidelines that prohibit racist, sexist and abusive content, moderators find themselves "constantly having to make difficult judgment calls". As also mentioned in the previous chapter, a recent study by Paasch-Colberg and Strippel (2022) has similarly shown that moderators often perceive the boundaries of hate speech to be blurry, for example, when the comments contain irony, rhetorical questions or puns. This also affects their moderation practices. While explicit hate is removed, less obvious cases are addressed with less restrictive measures, such as asking for civility or raising counterarguments or questions. However, given what is known about the prevalence of hate speech online, moderation is not always successful or necessarily challenged.

When it comes to the issue of blurred boundaries, the case of antisemitism is particularly interesting, both because there is an ongoing debate about how exactly it should be defined, especially in the context of discussions about Israel, and because it can often be difficult to identify (Becker & Troschke, 2023; Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020; Marcus, 2015; Wodak, 2015a). In this context, Waxman, Schraub and Hostein (2022: 1807) have argued, "Once one moves outside the realm of the far-right, neo-Nazi or White Supremacist archetype, the antisemitism of all political orientations can be difficult to identify". In most cases, the boundaries are not clear-cut, which leads to the "possibility for reinterpretation or contestation" (Waxman et al., 2022: 1807). It is therefore also important to examine the details of how different actors perceive antisemitism and the symbolic boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews as central to their boundary-work.

Experiencing and dealing with boundary violations

The consequence of no or inadequate moderation is that people can be exposed to and targeted by hate speech, which is seen as a threat to democracy, freedom of expression and human dignity (European Commission, 2016; United Nations, 2019; Waldron, 2012). Given that hate speech against minorities in general, and antisemitic hate speech in particular, is both illegal and widely regarded as politically and morally illegitimate in Norway, and undermines the democratic value of equality, the presence and spread of hateful content online can thus be understood as boundary violations (see Enjolras, 2017; Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016; Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2021). Furthermore, if such boundary violations reflect or lead to inequality between groups,

particularly between the majority population and minorities, they can be seen as contributing to the maintenance or creation of social boundaries (see also Enjolras, 2017; Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017).

In general, it seems to be relatively common for active Internet users to be exposed to online hate (e.g., Oksanen et al., 2014; Reichelmann et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies have shown that for people from minority backgrounds, exposure to racism and hate seems to be an almost inevitable and normalised aspect of being online (Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019, 2021b). Although being the target of hostile and offensive content can be uncomfortable for anyone, hate speech against minorities is considered to be particularly problematic because it not only harms the individual targeted but can also negatively affect other members of the minority group concerned (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Perry, 2018).

Research on the experiences and effects of hate speech on minorities has illustrated that experiencing hate speech can have emotional and behavioural consequences (e.g., Awan & Zempi, 2016; Leets, 2002). For example, Gelber and McNamara's (2016) extensive qualitative interview study of different minorities in Australia found that experiencing hate speech can lead to a range of negative emotional and (potentially) behavioural social outcomes, including fear and pain, and feelings of disempowerment, silencing and exclusion from society. The study also suggests that while minorities experience hate speech both in the form of face-to-face encounters and the general circulation of prejudiced or racist language in the public sphere (e.g., through the media), they do not necessarily perceive these two types of hate speech as qualitatively different in terms of seriousness or harmfulness.

Studies focusing specifically on experiences of online hate and racism have found similar emotional effects, such as feelings of anger, distress, resentment and exhaustion (e.g., Ortiz, 2019; Ștefăniță & Buf, 2021). Moreover, research has suggested that such experiences can influence people's behaviour. In a large-scale quantitative study among Norwegian adults, Fladmoe and Nadim (2017) 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. Consequently, Fladmoe and Nadim (2017: 71) have argued that "hate speech and other unpleasant messages can represent social boundaries to the exercise of free speech". Following this line of thought, this thesis specifically examines the impact of antisemitic hate speech on Norwegian Jews who have engaged in public debates through the news media, and whether and how experiences of antisemitic hate speech can function as a social boundary to (further) public participation.

In this context, it is also important to look at how targets of online hate deal with such experiences. While there is no doubt about the various harms of hate speech, research has also shown that there is considerable potential for agency and resilience, specifically among young adults from different minority backgrounds who have developed strategies for coping with and responding to experiences of hate and hostility both online and offline (Ellefsen et al., 2022; Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019, 2021a). In a study of young Muslims' responses to anti-Muslim hostility, Ellefsen and Sandberg (2022: 2615) have suggested that active resistance, such as talking back, can be particularly important because it can "alter mainstream knowledge and prejudice about the group in question". From a boundary perspective, active resistance to antisemitism and hate speech can thus be seen as a way of challenging social boundaries.

Antisemitic hate speech and boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere

To sum up, this thesis uses the theoretical concepts of boundaries and boundary-making to analyse three different dimensions of antisemitic hate speech in the Norwegian digital public sphere: 1) how the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are pushed through the production and promotion of antisemitic content, including the nuances of and the contexts in which it occurs, 2) how such boundaries are drawn through comment moderation (as a form of boundary-work), including perceptions and practices, and 3) the experiences of boundary violations among members of the small and historically vulnerable Jewish minority in Norway.

Overall, this provides a holistic perspective for analysing and understanding antisemitic hate speech in digital media, including its discursive manifestations, different actors' understandings of the phenomenon, as well as its social consequences, which are not necessarily clear or fixed (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). More broadly, it can also shed light on key dynamics of the digital public sphere. The concept of boundary-making refers specifically to how the boundaries of the digital public sphere, whether symbolic or social, do not emerge or exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are created and contested through complex social processes in which many different actors are involved in shaping the symbolic distinction(s) between legitimate and illegitimate speech on many different digital platforms, which in turn can influence the social inclusion or exclusion of specific groups in society at large, in this case, the Jewish minority (see also Enjolras, 2017; Midtbøen et al., 2017).

The next chapter provides an overview and discussion of the methodological approach on which this thesis is based, including the specific actors and digital media platforms in focus and the empirical material and methods used.

4 Methodology

This chapter describes and discusses the methodology of the thesis, specifically the methodological assessments and choices made regarding the research design, methods and data, legal and ethical considerations, as well as the main strengths and limitations.

Research strategy and design

The thesis is based on four qualitative empirical case studies, which together provide different insights into the overall research question of how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. Antisemitism is a particularly interesting case for the study of boundary-making, because, as noted in previous chapters, despite widespread agreement that it is illegitimate, there is often disagreement about what constitutes antisemitism and how it should be handled and met (e.g., Waxman et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a need for in-depth and critical knowledge of the boundary-making processes that emerges from different interpretations and forms of practice. The following sections discuss the value of a qualitative approach in this context and the selection of the specific cases that make up the study.

The value of a qualitative research approach

Overall, this thesis is based on a qualitative, interpretive research approach. Qualitative research is "a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2016: 32-33). Furthermore, it typically involves an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. It focuses on how social actors interpret their social world, based on the premise that social phenomena are "outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena 'out there' and separate from those involved in [their] construction" (Bryman, 2016: 375). Consequently, using a qualitative research strategy provides the opportunity for in-depth exploration of meaning and meaning-making, thick descriptions of a phenomenon, emphasis on contextual understanding, emphasis on process, and flexibility in the research process (Bryman, 2016: 392-397).

In this thesis, a qualitative approach was valuable because it allowed for in-depth and exploratory analyses of the different dimensions of how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. More specifically: 1) how antisemitic hate speech is expressed (i.e., the understandings of those who express such views), including the nuances of how and in what contexts it occurs, 2) how different political actors perceive and deal with antisemitic hate speech and the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, and 3) how antisemitic hate speech is perceived, experienced, and

dealt with by those who are targeted. The ambition was not to examine all digital media platforms on which antisemitic hate speech can occur, or the extent to which it occurs, but rather to focus on a selection of cases that are particularly relevant for analysing understandings of antisemitism and boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. These cases are presented next.

Case selection

The four cases included have been strategically selected because the actors and digital media platforms in question were considered to play a key role in the Norwegian digital public sphere, especially when it comes to the issue of antisemitic hate speech. All of them are so-called "typical" or "exemplifying" cases (Bryman, 2016: 62), each of which provides a well-suited context for exploring how understandings of antisemitism inform the different dimensions of boundary-making, i.e., how boundaries are pushed and drawn, and how boundary violations are experienced.

The first article explores how the boundaries of what can be said about Jews are pushed through the production and promotion of antisemitic news on *Frihetskamp*, the official website and main digital platform of the Norwegian chapter of the neo-Nazi organisation Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM). This case was selected because NRM is among the largest and most prominent right-wing extremist organisations, and the only openly antisemitic organisation in Norway today. Although several studies of the Norwegian far-right political landscape have identified NRM as an essentially antisemitic organisation, few have focused specifically on NRM and how this organisation communicates its antisemitic worldview (Bjørgo & Gjelsvik, 2018; Døving & Emberland, 2018; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018; Haanshuus, 2018; Simonsen, 2020b).

The second article examines whether and how the boundaries of what can be said about Jews are pushed by online debaters in the comment sections of three prominent far-right alternative media sites, and how the editorial staff contributes to the drawing of boundaries through comment moderation, as a form of boundary-work. The alternative media studied - *Document*, *Resett* and *Rights.no* - were chosen on the assumption that, despite their editorial positions on antisemitism as illegitimate and unacceptable, they may attract far-right and extremist online debaters who support antisemitic views, especially since these alternative media actors also claim to defend the widest possible freedom of speech, which they perceive as threatened in Norwegian media and society. Furthermore, although the alternative media studied may dislike being characterised as "far right", they are important actors within this

political landscape in Norway (Berntzen, 2020; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018). Finally, these sites were selected because of their position as controversial but significant media actors with a relatively wide reach in the Norwegian digital public sphere (e.g., Ihlebæk and Nygaard 2021; Newman et al. 2020).

The third article investigates whether and how the boundaries of what can be said about Jews are pushed by online debaters in comments sections facilitated by the Norwegian political left, specifically in discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how left-wing organisations perform boundary-work and draw boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate (antisemitic) criticism of Israel. This case was selected because previous research has demonstrated that this topic can evoke antisemitism within anti-racist political left-wing milieus, most notably among actors who disapprove of the state of Israel's existence, policies, and actions (Bachner, 1999; Gidley et al., 2020; Hirsh, 2018; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020). More specifically, the study explores how this issue is perceived and dealt with on the official Facebook pages of eleven key organisations and actors at the core of, or associated with, the political left in Norway. This includes all three left-wing political parties represented in the Parliament (Red Party, Socialist Left Party, and the Labour Party), their youth organisations (Red Youth, Socialist Youth and the Worker's Youth League), two central activist organisations (The Palestine Committee and Joint Committee on Palestine), a humanitarian organisation (Norwegian People's Aid), one of the largest trade unions (Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees) and a left-wing alternative news media site (*Radical Portal*). In sum, these organisations and actors form a huge and important part of the Norwegian left-wing political landscape, all of which are also concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are critical of Israel, albeit to varying degrees.

The fourth article takes a different approach, focusing on the experiences of boundary violations among potential targets of antisemitic hate speech. The article explores the experiences of 15 Norwegian Jews who have participated in the media or public debate *as* Jews, thus becoming visible public voices for the small, diverse, and historically vulnerable Jewish minority in Norway. This case was chosen based on the assumption that being a public minority voice and participating in public debate can involve experiences of hate, particularly online (e.g., Midtbøen, 2018). Consequently, the purpose of focusing on Jewish experiences was to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the prevalence and characteristics of antisemitism in the Norwegian digital public sphere and the impact of antisemitic hate speech on those targeted.

Methods

The four articles that constitute the main body of the thesis are based on qualitative analyses of digital content, semi-structured interviews, or a combination of both. The following sections first provide an overview of the different types of qualitative research methods and empirical material used, and then discuss the value of combining them.

Qualitative analyses of digital content

Three of the four articles are based entirely (article 1) or partly (articles 2 and 3) on qualitative analyses of a selection of content from different digital media platforms. This method was used to explore how antisemitic hate speech is expressed, including the nuances of how and in what contexts it occurs. Given that antisemitic hate speech can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly, a close reading and interpretation of digital content was a central part of the analysis in all three articles. While a brief discussion of the analytical approaches is provided here, more details can be found in the methods section of each article.

Article 1 is based on an analysis of news stories about Jews on the extreme right site *Frihetskamp* (N=231) that originate from established news media but have been manipulated to convey an antisemitic message. Article 2 draws on strategically selected comment sections of the "anti-Islamic" far-right alternative media sites *Document*, *Resett* and *Rights.no* (N=561 comments). Both types of data were manually collected and systematised. In these two articles, which both deal with questions related to the far right and antisemitism, the analyses of digital content were inspired by the discourse-historical approach (DHA). The DHA is a variant of critical discourse analysis, which Ruth Wodak and colleagues developed to analyse subtle antisemitic rhetoric in post-war Austria.

Although the DHA initially was developed to study antisemitism, it has later been used to analyse ideology, power, inequality, and other types of discriminatory language. As an analytical approach, it is characterised by its emphasis on solving (social) problems by focusing specifically on the historical embedding and change of language, while also taking context into account. While the DHA has strong roots in linguistics, different theories, data and methods can be combined to gain an adequate understanding and explanation of the research object (Reisigl, 2018; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Articles 1 and 2 use specific aspects of the DHA as inspiration to analyse antisemitic discursive practices and arguments about antisemitism in the context of ideologically different far-right alternative media, the socio-diagnostic critique and the text or discourse immanent critique, respectively (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016: 25). While the former is concerned with the latent, persuasive, or

"manipulative" character of discursive practices, the latter aims to discover inconsistencies, (self-)contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the internal structures of a discourse.

Article 3 builds on an exploratory mapping of key actors and digital media platforms associated with the Norwegian political left, followed by a qualitative pilot study of the official Facebook pages of the eleven left-wing organisations mentioned above. Specifically, the pilot study involved observation and close reading of online discussions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict covering the period 2017-2019, and field notes on the characteristics of these discussions and examples of antisemitic hate speech. The pilot study was thus similar to netnography but conducted in retrospect (Kozinets, 2015). The purpose of the pilot study was twofold. First, the pilot study was necessary to gain an overview of how important the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was to the online activities of the organisations in question and whether posts had triggered antisemitic comments that had not been removed. Second, some of these examples were then used to create individual practical tasks to be used in the interviews with left-wing moderators. The value of these practical tasks is discussed later in this chapter.

In analysing the digital content (articles 1-3), the focus was on the specific overt and covert anti-Jewish discourse and comments found, while also considering the context (e.g., digital platform, overall discussion). In other words, I focused on content rather than intention and motivation, although in studying neo-Nazi news production it was also particularly important to consider the inherent antisemitic ideology of the NRM. In writing the articles, the aim was to show and explain how and why specific statements can be interpreted and characterised as antisemitic or have antisemitic undertones.

Qualitative interviews

Three of the four articles are based partly (article 2), mostly (article 3) or entirely (article 4) on qualitative semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews are particularly useful when the aim is to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015: 3). This method was used to explore perceptions of antisemitism and the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, and practices of boundary-drawing (boundary-work) among the different political actors, as well as to obtain in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the experiences of Norwegian Jews, including the consequences of boundary violations for those who have been targets of antisemitic hate speech.

Article 2 draws on interviews with editorial staff members of far-right alternative media sites *Document*, *Resett* and *Rights.no*. The aim was to interview two key informants from each site: the editor-in-chief (or someone in a similar role) and someone with specific responsibility for the comment sections. Of the six people contacted, four agreed to be interviewed digitally on Zoom and one provided information by email (N=5). The interviews were conducted in June 2021. While the ongoing pandemic was the main reason for conducting these interviews on Zoom, one informant's wish for complete anonymity was the reason for conducting this interview by email. The email interview with the moderator of *Rights.no* was conducted through a third party and was, therefore, less extensive than the others, with limited opportunity for follow-up questions.

Article 3 is based on interviews with representatives of eleven different organisations that form the core of, or are associated with, the political left in Norway (N=11). While the aim was to cover all relevant left-wing actors and organisations in Norway, some - mostly less prominent - actors and perspectives were omitted due to a lack of access to informants. Of the 15 organisations that were contacted, most agreed to participate and 13 interviews were conducted. However, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Klassekampen* insisted that they do not facilitate online debates on their Facebook page, which is mainly used for marketing purposes, and the informant from the trade union umbrella organisation LO Norway could not comment on the organisation's political views (and a second informant never responded to interview requests). Consequently, these two interviews are not part of the empirical material. Furthermore, the activist organisation BDS Norway and the alternative media site *Steigan.no* never responded to interview requests.

The aim was to recruit informants who were responsible for or had specific knowledge of how their organisation manages online content and social media. Based on this criterion, it was up to the organisations to decide who would represent them in the interview study (e.g., the organisation's leader, the head of communications or a communications advisor). All of the interviews were conducted in the form of face-to-face meetings. About half of the interviews were conducted between January and early March 2020. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and the first lockdown. The second half of the interviews were therefore conducted outdoors in May, June, and August 2020.

Article 4 is based on in-depth interviews with 15 Norwegian Jews, who have in common that they have participated in Norwegian national news media and have been open about their Jewish identity in this specific context. While the main aim was to recruit a large

sample of "public Jews", it was also an ambition to recruit a diverse sample of Jewish interviewees, particularly in terms of age, gender, and media experience. Of the 19 potential participants contacted, 15 agreed to take part in the study. In the end, the sample of people interviewed was quite diverse. The interviews were conducted between March and June 2022, as face-to-face meetings (N=13) or digitally via Zoom (N=2). The face-to-face interviews took place in various locations chosen by the informants themselves, such as their home or a nearby café, their place of work or my place of work (i.e., the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies). In all settings, it was important that no one else could overhear the conversations so that the informants could speak as freely as they wished.

In all three interview studies (articles 2, 3 and 4), an overarching aim was to explore how the different actors understand and perceive antisemitism and its symbolic (discursive) boundaries. Another overarching aim was to gain knowledge about their experiences of antisemitic hate speech (including specific examples) and how they deal with it – at an organisational level by the political actors on their digital platforms, and at the individual level by the Jews who are exposed to and targeted by hate speech.

In the latter interview study (article 4), the aim was also to explore whether and how antisemitic hate speech constitutes a social boundary for the Jewish minority voices in question (e.g., Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Because antisemitic hate speech - directly or indirectly - targets and affects the Jewish minority, I considered it particularly important to include their perspectives. As argued by Nikunen (2021: 9), "in the context of marginalisation, knowledge from experience can offer valuable insight on the structures, sites and experiences of racial injustice".

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded using NVivo. This was considered important to increase the reliability, i.e. the consistency and trustworthiness, of the research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In all the interview studies, the analytical approaches were exploratory, but informed by previous research relevant to the specific study, and the coding process was recursive. More about the specific analytical approaches can be found in the methods sections of each article.

The value of combining methods and data

The combination of these methods and the different empirical materials is valuable because together they form a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on antisemitism in the Norwegian digital public sphere. On an empirical level, this combination provides a

qualitative holistic perspective on the characteristics (content), countermeasures, and consequences of antisemitic hate speech in digital media (cf. the literature review). On a theoretical level, the combination provides important insights into how the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are pushed and drawn by different political actors, and into the experiences of boundary violations among the Jewish minority. In other words, the sum of the different qualitative methods and empirical material illuminates how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere (see Table 2).

Table 2. Overview of methods and theoretical contributions in each article

	Article	Method and data	Dimension(s) of boundary-making
1	Recontextualising the news: How antisemitic discourses are constructed in extreme far-right alternative media	Critical discourse analysis of digital content	Pushing boundaries
2	Freedom of expression or censorship of antisemitic hate speech? Editorial and audience perspectives on comment moderation in far-right alternative media	Critical discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews and digital content	Drawing boundaries (Pushing boundaries)
3	Comment moderation as boundary-work: How left-wing political organisations deal with antisemitic hate speech in online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict	Inductive, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews + qualitative pilot study of digital content	Drawing boundaries (Pushing boundaries)
4	Overcoming hate: Jewish minority voices' strategies for participating in the news media	Inductive, interpretive analysis of semi-structured interviews	Experiencing boundary violations (Pushing boundaries)

Legal and ethical considerations

When researching humans and human activities, whether online or offline, it is necessary to consider relevant legislation and research ethics. In the Norwegian context, both the Personal Data Act and the national guidelines for research ethics emphasise the importance of considering individuals' right to privacy and protecting these rights (Lovdata, 2018; The

National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, 2021). Moreover, such considerations are particularly important when research deals with sensitive issues such as politics or religion, or, as in this case, antisemitism. This thesis has been shaped by such legal and ethical considerations, both in how the project was originally designed and how it has been carried out.

The following sections provide an overview of the key considerations made in this project, first in relation to the collection and processing of digital content, and then in relation to the collection and processing of interview data. Finally, some important overarching ethical considerations are also discussed. These relate to my non-Jewish identity and the fact that antisemitism is a contested phenomenon and a sometimes polarised area of research.

Collecting and processing digital content

As a general rule, research should be based on informed consent (Lovdata, 2018; The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, 2021). However, it is not always desirable or possible, particularly when the research concerns controversial but socially important issues such as online hate speech and antisemitism. Consequently, there are also exceptions to this general rule when the social value of the research clearly outweighs the disadvantages for the individuals concerned.

In this thesis, the collection and processing of digital content was not based on informed consent. From the outset, it was considered unlikely that individuals expressing antisemitic hate speech online would want to contribute to the research project. Consequently, the digital content used in this thesis has been collected and processed in accordance with section 9 of the Norwegian Personal Data Act, which states that "personal data can be processed without the consent of the data subject if the processing is necessary for […] purposes linked to scientific or historical research […] and society's interest in the processing taking place clearly exceeds the disadvantages for the individual" (Lovdata, 2018). This also means that the processing must be carried out in accordance with "necessary guarantees" to ensure the legal rights and freedoms of the individuals in question. In practice, this implied that a so-called Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) had to be carried out before data collection could begin. This was done in cooperation with the Data Protection Services for Research

(also known as NSD/Sikt) and the then-newly appointed Data Protection Officer at the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies.[4]

Based on both legal and ethical considerations, the collection and processing of digital data have been guided by three key principles. First, the digital content used can be characterised as publicly available data in both a technical and a theoretical sense. This means that all digital content has been collected from open digital media platforms that are available and visible to all, have a (potentially) wide audience and are therefore considered part of the Norwegian digital public sphere. From a legal point of view, it is also important that the information collected has been made public by the individuals themselves. Semi-public online forums, such as closed Facebook groups that require membership, have also been avoided out of consideration for the ethical principle of reasonable expectation of publicity (see The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, 2019).

Second, in line with the principle of data minimisation, the focus of the data collection was on overt or covert discourses and comments about Jews, rather than on the individuals who made them and their characteristics. This means that personal data such as names and other characteristics (e.g., gender, profile picture) were left out.

Third, to ensure anonymity in the publications, the findings are presented either by summarising and paraphrasing the content of the comment sections or by using only short excerpts from specific statements as examples. Although some detail and transparency may have been lost due to the simplification of content, this was done to minimise the possibility of individual online debaters being identified. In addition, anonymising individuals was also considered important to avoid amplifying marginal antisemitic voices (for a discussion of the potential role of researchers in the "mainstreaming" of marginal right-wing extremists, see Askanius, 2019).

Collecting and processing interview data

Interview data was collected and processed in accordance with Section 8 of the Personal Data Act. This means that all interviews were based on informed consent and conducted and processed following the principle of data minimisation. In other words, the personal

[4] As part of the relatively long and confusing process of understanding the then-new legal framework for this type of research (i.e., GDPR), which was implemented in July 2018, I also received advice from Ingunn Rasmussen Sørlie, Special Advisor at the Institute for Social Research (ISF), and Vidar Enebakk, Director at the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH)—a big thank you to both of them for their help.

information that was collected was relevant to the research objective and anonymised as far as possible.

Before the interviews, the interviewees were informed about the purpose of the interview study and their rights as participants. After the interviews, all interviewees were offered the opportunity to read the transcripts, change any answers and even withdraw from participation. In all three interview studies (articles 2, 3 and 4), some informants used this opportunity to clarify their answers. In the study with representatives of left-wing political organisations (article 3), one informant withdrew from participation because the given task (i.e., the assessment of examples from their comment sections) was perceived as a knowledge test that the informant did not feel comfortable answering on behalf of the organisation.

Concerning anonymity in the publications, none of the informants are mentioned by name in the analyses. However, the informants representing the far-right alternative media and the left-wing political organisations are indirectly identifiable because their organisational affiliations and roles are mentioned, which they were made aware of and consented to. In the case of the Jewish informants, it was important to ensure that they were not identifiable, especially since they were sharing personal experiences on a sensitive issue (for more details, see the methods section in article 4).

Positionality in research on a minority-related issue

As this research concerns a minority-related issue, or more precisely a social problem affecting a particular and historically marginalised minority, it may be important to clarify that I am not a member of the minority group in question. While working on this thesis, I have occasionally been asked if I am Jewish, particularly by other academics who identify as Jews, but also by others. The question has not necessarily been about my identity as such (although in some cases it may have been), but about where my interest in studying antisemitism came from.

My usual response has been to say that I am not Jewish and to emphasise that before I started this PhD project, I was interested in, and had already done some research on, the relationship between digital media and far-right activism in general and right-wing extremism in particular, as well as the role of digital media in the spread of prejudice and hate against minorities. It was this particular interest that motivated me to apply for the position as a PhD research fellow and to conduct this project as part of a larger research project, *Shifting*

boundaries. Definitions, Expressions and Consequences of Antisemitism in Contemporary Norway, hosted by the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies.

The fact that I belong to the majority population, i.e., I am not Jewish, probably had the greatest impact on the interview study with Jewish informants. Even though both the Jewish informants and I are Norwegian, we have different backgrounds and experiences, especially when it comes to antisemitism. While I deal with antisemitism as an academic subject, they have to deal with it as a historical and contemporary threat to the minority group to which they belong. Consequently, my non-Jewish identity is likely to have had an impact on the interview situation, but it is difficult to say exactly how.

My identity was not explicitly mentioned before or during the interviews. However, considering that the Jewish minority in Norway is so small (often estimated to be about 1500 people), I believe that most of the interviewees assumed and/or knew that I was not a Jew. To illustrate, my position as an (assumed) "outsider" led several informants to tell anecdotes or give detailed explanations about Jewish identity, culture, history, or humour. In general, my impression was that most, if not all, of the informants were very open about their experiences of being a Norwegian (public) Jew, both positive and negative. Some of them also shared personal and sensitive stories about being a minority, giving me insights into experiences I have not had and know little about. In this way, my position as an outsider may have led to thicker descriptions of their perspectives and experiences than if I had been a member of the Jewish minority. During the interviews, I was careful to listen and ask follow-up questions, both if there was something I did not understand (as a non-Jew) and if the informants assumed that I knew what they were talking about because I was affiliated with the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies and had done research on antisemitism before meeting them.

Navigating in a polarised field

Another overarching ethical issue concerns positionality in research on a contentious issue. As noted in previous chapters, antisemitism is a contested concept and phenomenon. Although there is broad agreement that it is morally unacceptable, there is disagreement and differing understandings of what exactly constitutes antisemitism (see e.g., Waxman et al., 2022). This issue becomes particularly polarised and politicised when it is linked to discussions about Israel and Israeli politics. This is often evident in public debates on the subject but also in the research literature on contemporary antisemitism, where the question of how antisemitism should be defined has become a central and partially controversial issue (e.g., Marcus, 2015).

At the heart of this debate is the question of when criticism of or opposition to Israel becomes antisemitic, and what constitutes legitimate criticism of the Israeli state.

Although there is agreement that antisemitism and opposition to Israel are phenomena that sometimes overlap, there is a lack of consensus within the research community about where exactly to draw the line between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism. There are, for example, two competing definitions, with associated petitions signed by many scholars of antisemitism studies and related fields: The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism, also known as the IHRA definition, and The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA). Neither of these definitions has been developed for academic purposes, but both are described as tools that have been developed to help identify and combat antisemitism (e.g., at the state level) (The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016; *The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism*, 2021).

The polarised and politicised nature of debates on antisemitism also makes it a challenging subject to study and, in some cases, to disseminate knowledge about. To illustrate, when discussing my PhD project with other academics, I have experienced being implicitly labelled on the one hand as naive because "there is no such thing as [legitimate] anti-Zionism or 'criticism of Israel'" – only antisemitism, and on the other hand as a "friend" of Israel (i.e., the government) *because* I study antisemitism. In none of these cases was I expressing my views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but because of my research, and probably the political views of the person I was speaking to, I was nevertheless associated with one side or the other. I have also experienced, in two different academic settings, that although "everyone" had an opinion on how to define antisemitism, few were willing to discuss the definition(s) openly in plenary, but rather made critical remarks about it during the coffee breaks.

In this context, it is important to note that although there is controversy, the concept of antisemitism is not a completely empty signifier. Regarding the IHRA and JDA definitions, it is not really the overall definition of antisemitism that is in dispute, but how the various examples associated with the proposed definitions can and should be interpreted. As noted in Chapter 1, there is broad agreement among researchers on the core characteristics of antisemitism, namely that it refers to prejudice, hostility, and discrimination against Jews, which can manifest itself in a variety of ways. The overall aim of this thesis was to take both a comprehensive and a nuanced approach to the study of antisemitism by exploring both different forms of antisemitic hate speech and different actors' understandings of antisemitism

in the Norwegian digital public sphere. To highlight the many nuances of antisemitic hate speech, it was also an overall aim to show and explain how and why certain statements can be interpreted and labelled as antisemitic, as also discussed above.

Strengths and limitations

To conclude this chapter, I highlight and discuss the main methodological strengths of the thesis, reflect (more) on the quality of the research and some important limitations. In order to assess the quality of qualitative research, it is particularly important to consider three main criteria: First, the *validity* of the methods and data used. As emphasised by Mason (2018: 25), "If your research is valid, it means that you are observing, identifying or 'measuring' what you say you are". Similarly, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015: 282) have suggested that validity is about "whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate". Second, the *consistency* and *trustworthiness* of research findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), or in other words, the *reliability* and *accuracy* of the research methods and techniques (Mason, 2018). And third, what kind of *generalisations* or broader claims can be made based on the research.

In terms of validity, one of the main strengths of this thesis is the research design, which emphasises the importance of looking at antisemitic hate speech and understandings of antisemitism from the perspectives of different actors. Although not all relevant actors are covered, at least not in-depth or explicitly (such as the marginal far-right party Alliansen, conspiratorial or religious online communities or established news media), the cases included represent a wide range of key actors and digital media platforms that are crucial for gaining insights into the complex overall research question of how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. Furthermore, the qualitative approach is valuable for focusing precisely on different actors' understandings of antisemitism, including the nuances and contexts of how antisemitic hate speech is expressed, as well as how its discursive boundaries and boundary violations are perceived, dealt with, and experienced. Notably, the qualitative research design also means that this thesis cannot draw conclusions about the extent of antisemitism in the Norwegian digital public sphere, but it is worth repeating that this has also proved difficult in quantitative research (see Brekke et al., 2019).

A particular strength of the research design is that it considers the experiences of Jews with antisemitic hate speech. While previous studies addressing questions about hate speech have tended to focus on content or countermeasures (i.e., how boundaries are pushed or

drawn), this thesis also examines the consequences of hate speech (i.e., boundary violations) by mapping the experiences of Norwegian "public Jews", which is perhaps the most unique single contribution of the thesis. At the same time, it is important to note that this thesis cannot say anything about experiences of antisemitic hate speech and its impact on Jews who have not yet participated in public debates through the news media.

Another and related main strength of the thesis is the combination of data and methods, as also discussed above. Taken together, the various empirical materials and methods used provide better and more valid insights into how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making than any single data source and method would provide on its own. In other words, approaching the overall research question from different angles enhances the validity of the research by suggesting and demonstrating that the social phenomenon being studied is not one-dimensional (Mason, 2018: 239). In addition, transparency about how the data and methods have been used, as discussed in this chapter, helps to increase both the validity and the trustworthiness of the research.

The value of combining data also applies specifically to articles 2 and 3, both of which deal with how political actors perceive and draw boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, with a particular focus on their understandings of antisemitic hate speech. In these two articles, the analyses of digital content helped to complement the information generated through the interviews. However, although the main purpose of the two studies was the same, the empirical materials – and hence also the analyses – are not entirely comparable. Due to the pandemic, the interviews with representatives of far-right alternative media were conducted via Zoom (article 2), while the interviews with representatives of left-wing organisations were conducted as face-to-face meeting (article 3). This means that only the interviews with left-wing moderators, which were the first to be planned and carried out (partly also during the pandemic), included a practical task as part of the interviews. As these practical tasks proved to help enrich the informants' descriptions of their understanding of antisemitism and boundaries, and the dilemmas they face as moderators, it would probably have been useful to include a similar practical task in the interviews with the far-right representatives. Unfortunately, this was technically difficult to do.

Overall, this means that the interviews with representatives of far-right alternative media did not generate as rich a set of descriptions of their perspectives on antisemitism and difficult boundaries as the interviews with representatives of the political left. Nevertheless, both interview studies provide unique insights into how these different political actors

perceive antisemitic hate speech and how they, at least claim to, draw boundaries on their digital platforms. As both articles also illustrate, there is not always consistency between their policies and practices. It should also be noted that the selection of digital content in these two studies is not directly comparable, as the data used in article 3 covered more actors and a longer time period than the data used in article 2. In both cases, the examples found and analysed should be viewed as "snapshots" of what antisemitic hate speech looks like in these different digital contexts.

Finally, another main strength worth highlighting is the overarching analytical focus on interpretation, context, and nuance. This is particularly important because antisemitism comes in many forms, can be communicated both explicitly and implicitly, and can be understood in different ways (e.g., Waxman et al., 2022; Wodak, 2015). In this thesis, such a focus was central to both the analyses of digital content and the collection and analyses of interview data and was considered necessary to ensure methodological consistency and accuracy (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Mason, 2018). Following this line of thought, it was also considered important to provide concrete examples and explanations when presenting these analyses in the articles, to increase the trustworthiness of the research and to show how this was done. This applied both to how and why statements can be interpreted and characterised as antisemitic (the analyses of digital content) and to how antisemitic hate speech is perceived, experienced, and dealt with by different actors (the analyses of interview data).

As for the question of generalisability, i.e., whether and how the findings have any wider resonance outside of the specific context(s) studied, this thesis can do so mainly at a theoretical level (Mason, 2018: 243-244). First, while the empirical focus of this thesis is on antisemitic hate speech in the Norwegian digital public sphere, antisemitism is not a specifically Norwegian phenomenon. Consequently, this thesis can shed light on the dynamics associated with the rise of digital media and antisemitic hate speech in liberal democratic contexts. Although the political and historical context differ in different countries, even among liberal democracies, which in turn may also influence (understandings of) antisemitism, the thesis provides perspectives on boundary-making as a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon. Second, the analytical framework proposed, and the findings of this thesis can be used to inform studies of how other types of hate speech are pushed, drawn, and experienced by different actors in the digital public sphere.

5 Summary of articles

This chapter provides a brief summary of each of the four articles on which the thesis is based, including their main findings and individual arguments.

Article 1 – Recontextualising the news: How antisemitic discourses are constructed in extreme far-right alternative media

Published in *Nordicom Review*, Special Issue on "Uncivility, racism, and populism: Discourses and interactive practices in anti- & post-democratic communication", 42(S1), 2021, 37-50. Co-authored with Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk.

The article explores how the neo-Nazi organisation Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is pushing the boundaries of what can be said about Jews by using content from professional media to produce and promote "uncivil news" with an antisemitic message on their website *Frihetskamp.* Specifically, the article analyses how news stories are amended to communicate both explicit and implicit antisemitic discourses.

The findings show that four distinct forms of antisemitic representations are reinforced when news items from established sources are selected and recontextualised on *Frihetskamp*: 1) the Jews as powerful, 2) the Jews as intolerant and anti-liberal, 3) the Jews as exploiters of victimhood, and 4) the Jews as inferior. These exclusionary and conspiratorial ideas, also known from historical Nazi propaganda, are reproduced by linking them to contemporary societal and political contexts and the current news agenda. The overall message is that Jews are the ultimate enemy and the common denominator behind all developments deemed destructive in society. However, this overarching message is presented in bits and pieces throughout the news coverage, and often by implicit means.

Consequently, the article argues that if readers have limited knowledge of historical antisemitic tropes, the antisemitic message may be difficult to detect. Furthermore, the fact that the news coverage is based on actual news from the established media and with traceable sources can create a sense of legitimacy that blurs the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate, hateful content. This is of great concern because as the digital public sphere has become more complex, extremist actors such as NRM can more easily spread their antisemitic message, avoid legal sanctions, and potentially reach new audiences.

Article 2 – Freedom of expression or censorship of antisemitic hate speech? Editorial and audience perspectives on comment moderation in far-right alternative media

Published in *Journalistica,* Special Issue on "Exploring the boundaries of Nordic journalism", 16(1), 2022, 12-34.

The article explores how three prominent Norwegian far-right – and (seemingly) anti-antisemitic – alternative media sites, *Document*, *Resett* and *Rights.no*, perceive and draw boundaries in their comment sections (i.e., perform boundary-work), particularly focusing on the dilemma between defending free speech and censoring antisemitic hate speech. The study also explores whether and how editorial and audience perspectives on this issue are aligned. Specifically, the article analyses how moderators and debaters understand the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, and how transgressive content should be dealt with.

The findings show that although they are strong advocates of freedom of expression, there is a consensus among the editorial staff that comment moderation is necessary, mostly for normative or strategic reasons. This applies specifically to antisemitic hate speech, but also to other types of harmful content, such as threats and hate speech against other groups. Among their audiences, the arguments were more varied. While the majority argued that antisemitism should be countered (e.g., through censorship or counter-narratives), some of the debaters who opposed comment moderation did so while also expressing antisemitic ideas, particularly about Jewish power in media and society at large, thus pushing the boundaries of what can be said about Jews.

Overall, the arguments among the editorial staff were similar to how mainstream media perceive the responsibility of drawing boundaries in online debates. Consequently, the article argues that these oppositional media actors are not so alternative after all when it comes to regulating comment sections. Comment moderation is crucial for all actors seeking to obtain or protect their legitimacy, regardless of their (counter-) position in the digital public sphere. However, it is not always clear or consistent where the boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable should be set. While there is widespread agreement that antisemitic hate speech is illegitimate, there is more tolerance for negative generalised statements about Muslims and immigrants, which underpins these actors' antagonism towards these groups.

Article 3 – Comment moderation as boundary-work: How left-wing political organisations deal with antisemitic hate speech in online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In review, *Nordicom Review*.

The article explores how eleven key organisations at the core of or associated with the Norwegian political left perceive and draw boundaries in their comment sections, focusing on how they deal with antisemitic hate speech in the often polarised online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the often difficult boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel. Specifically, the article analyses the variety of dilemmas and challenges moderators face in this context by addressing this as a form of boundary-work.

The findings show that these dilemmas and challenges constitute three dimensions of boundary-work, which is related to 1) how these political organisations understand their role as moderators, 2) how they perceive the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate content, and 3) various contextual factors - all of which influence their moderation practices. Furthermore, the study shows that all of the organisations included in the study considered it important and acknowledged the responsibility of moderating comments on their digital platforms, mainly to facilitate democratic participation, ensure inclusive debates and reduce hate speech, but also to protect the pro-Palestinian cause. However, a particular and recurring challenge is that antisemitic hate speech is often characterised by implicit, conspiratorial, or ambiguous language, which means that the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech can be blurred. This suggests that in-depth knowledge of antisemitism is necessary to recognise it. Another challenge is that debates can be heated but the organisations have limited resources for moderation. Overall, this means that policies and practices are not always consistent.

The article argues that comment moderation can be understood as a form of boundary-work, as it involves a complex, multidimensional process of demarcating the often difficult boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, with significant stakes involved. Since there is widespread agreement that antisemitism is morally and politically illegitimate, how this type of boundary-work is carried out has consequences for the political legitimacy of the organisations in question.

Article 4 – Overcoming hate: Jewish minority voices' strategies for participating in the news media

Published in *Journalism Practice,* Special Issue on "The promotion of hate speech: From a media and journalism perspective", 18(2), 396-412, 2024.

The article explores experiences of media participation and antisemitism among Norwegian "public Jews", including the consequences of experiencing antisemitic hate speech and how such boundary violations are dealt with. Specifically, the article analyses the strategies used by Jewish minority voices in different phases of their media participation – both to achieve their aims as representatives of a small and historically vulnerable minority and to deal with the risks and experiences of antisemitism.

A key finding is that it is common to experience antisemitism when participating in the media as a Jewish minority voice, particularly in the comment sections of online newspapers and on Facebook, but also through other digital media platforms. Furthermore, antisemitic hate speech is reported to come in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources and senders. Most often from "the man in the street" who makes prejudiced remarks or conspiratorial statements or expresses hostile slurs about Jews. In Israel-related discussions, comments often include generalised claims blaming Jews (as a collective) for Israel's policies and actions, a type of argument that is thought to come from people with sympathies for the pro-Palestinian movement, the broader political left or from Muslims. Some have also been targeted by neo-Nazi online propaganda and other conspiracy theorists.

Another key finding is that the Jewish minority voices have different strategies for dealing with such experiences, such as not taking antisemitic comments personally, and that experiencing antisemitic hate speech has not discouraged them from (further) engagement with the news media. Consequently, the article argues that hate speech does not necessarily represent a boundary for public participation. Instead, awareness of historical and contemporary antisemitism and a general desire to reduce prejudice and hate had a mobilising effect on many of the participants. From a boundary perspective, it can also be argued that their media participation contributes to challenging social boundaries at a societal level. However, participating as a minority voice is both demanding and distressing and requires strong motivation, emotional resilience, and the ability to focus on the positive outcomes of media participation, including the possibility of social change.

6 Concluding discussion

This thesis has examined how understandings of antisemitism inform boundary-making in the Norwegian digital public sphere. A starting point was that despite widespread agreement that antisemitism is illegitimate and unacceptable, the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are neither clear, fixed nor settled, especially online, where many different actors contribute to boundary-making on a variety of digital media platforms. Studying how such boundary-making takes place is important because it sheds light on the broader dynamics of the digital public sphere, including how different actors are involved in shaping the symbolic boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech through different media practices, which in turn can affect the social inclusion or exclusion of minority groups (see also Alexander, 2006; Enjolras, 2017; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Midtbøen et al., 2017).

The overall research question was explored by analysing three different dimensions of boundary-making: how boundaries are pushed through the promotion of antisemitic hate speech, how boundaries are drawn through comment moderation and the experiences of boundary violations among members of the Jewish minority. Together, this provided a holistic perspective for analysing and understanding both antisemitic hate speech and its boundaries in different contexts of the Norwegian digital public sphere. The main contribution of the thesis to media studies is that it has provided an analytical framework for studying boundary-making in the digital public sphere, which is valuable for understanding both the different dimensions of hate speech in general and the broader dynamics of the digital public sphere.

Main findings

Although there is widespread agreement about the illegitimacy of antisemitism, antisemitic hate speech is still present in the Norwegian digital public sphere. In line with the three analytical dimensions, the thesis has three overarching main findings concerned with how the discursive boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews are pushed, drawn, and experienced.

Pushing boundaries

The first main finding concerns how the boundaries of what can be said about Jews are pushed, specifically through two types of media practices: the production of antisemitic news and the promotion of antisemitic hate speech in various comment sections. First, the thesis shows how the extremist neo-Nazi organisation Nordic Resistance Movement pushes the boundaries by producing and promoting news with an antisemitic message on its website

Frihetskamp. Second, the thesis also shows how the boundaries are pushed by online debaters associated with the political far right and left, as well as "ordinary" and (presumably) Muslim online debaters, through different types of anti-Jewish comments on a variety of digital media platforms, both mainstream and alternative.

A closer look at the content of these discursive media practices revealed that antisemitic hate speech takes different forms. Among the most common antisemitic tropes found across the case studies are various conspiratorial ideas about Jewish power and influence, including the role of Jews in developments considered destructive to society, such as immigration and restrictions on freedom of speech. These antisemitic ideas were particularly prominent in the neo-Nazi news coverage on *Frihetskamp*, but also prevalent among online debaters participating in the comment sections of the (seemingly) anti-antisemitic and far-right alternative media site *Resett*. The findings also suggest that conspiratorial ideas about Jewish power and influence appear in online debates facilitated by the political left - particularly when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discussed - and in the comment sections of mainstream online newspapers. From a historical perspective, none of these conspiratorial anti-Jewish tropes are new (Simonsen, 2020a). What is new is that these ideas are now being reproduced in different types of digital media by linking them to the current news agenda and ongoing political debates.

Another common type of antisemitic hate speech is the conflation of Jews and Israel, implying that Jews in general or Norwegian Jews in particular are responsible for the policies and actions of the Israeli state. This type of argument is typically used by individuals associated with or sympathetic to the broader political left and the pro-Palestinian movement, especially left-wing but also Muslim online debaters who oppose the state of Israel. Notably, the neo-Nazi news coverage on *Frihetskamp* also includes critical news about Israeli politics, which is used to conflate Jews with the Israeli state and to portray Jews as racists. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that antisemitic hate speech can take the form of prejudiced remarks or hostile slurs that appear less ideological than the other antisemitic tropes, ideas, and arguments, but still convey an anti-Jewish message.

The thesis also demonstrates that across these different types, antisemitic hate speech can be expressed in both overt and covert ways. Although this study did not measure the extent of various forms of antisemitic hate speech, the findings suggest that it is often expressed implicitly, which means that the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate (antisemitic) content tend to be blurred. This applies both to the neo-Nazis who disguise their antisemitic

message by imitating and manipulating legitimate news stories and to the online debaters who use various types of allusions and ambiguous and coded language, both in discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other topics that can trigger anti-Jewish sentiments.

As for the motivation for pushing these boundaries in implicit ways, the Nordic Resistance Movement is an organisation that deliberately seeks to promote an ideologically motivated antisemitic message and to push the boundaries of what can be said about Jews, often in a covert way in order to reach and influence a wider audience. When it comes to the question of why boundaries are being pushed by various online debaters, it is more difficult to give a definitive answer. On the one hand, some may adhere to an antisemitic worldview or endorse specific antisemitic ideas, while at the same time attempting to conceal their antisemitism. On the other hand, others may not be aware that they are reproducing old antisemitic tropes, for example, about Jewish power or greed, and/or may disagree about where the discursive boundaries should be set (e.g., Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020; Waxman et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings show that antisemitic hate speech is a diverse and complex phenomenon, which can be difficult to identify in digital media. In terms of specific contributions to antisemitism studies, this suggests that the much-used theoretical concept of "communication latency" needs to be updated and revised, especially considering that the digital public sphere is more extensive, fragmented, and complex than the pre-digital public sphere (Bergmann & Erb, 1986). In this context, a media studies approach is beneficial, because it provides a better and more nuanced understanding of how the (digital) public sphere works.

Drawing boundaries

The second main finding concerns how boundaries are drawn, specifically through comment moderation of antisemitic hate speech on the digital media platforms of prominent far-right and left-wing political actors. In this context, such boundary-work involves both perceptions of discursive boundaries and their role as moderators and practices of dealing with transgressive content.

The thesis shows that both the far-right "anti-Islamic" alternative media and the left-wing political organisations studied consider it important to counter antisemitic hate speech in their comment sections. In both cases, although they do not perceive antisemitism to be particularly widespread in the online debates they facilitate, comment moderation is considered necessary

because the prevalence of antisemitic hate speech is recognised as illegal and seen as harmful – both to their political agenda or image and to democracy and society at large. Consequently, comment moderation on both the far right and the broader left is motivated by a combination of legal, strategic, and moral considerations. Overall, this shows that when it comes to antisemitism, there is a strong consensus among these political actors, regardless of their ideologies and (counter) positions in the Norwegian public sphere, that it is illegitimate and unacceptable to promote and support such views.

The findings further suggest that while the editors and moderators representing far-right alternative media claimed that drawing such boundaries was fairly easy, most moderators representing left-wing political organisations emphasised that drawing the boundaries between antisemitic hate speech and legitimate speech can be difficult, especially because the debates are polarised and politicised, and the boundaries often are blurry. However, while it can be particularly challenging to identify antisemitism in debates about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a topic (more) often discussed on the political left, it is not necessarily easy to spot antisemitism on the far right. As argued by Waxman, Schraub and Hosein (2022: 1807), once one moves beyond the neo-Nazi archetype, "antisemitism of all political orientations can be difficult to identify". Although it is difficult to conclude from the empirical material of this thesis, the perception among representatives of the far-right alternative media that it is easy to moderate antisemitism may be explained by the fact that they deal primarily with neo-Nazi antisemitism in their comment sections, that they are particularly restrictive when it comes to comments about Jews, and/or that they are less aware of other, more covert and less well-known forms of antisemitic hate speech.

To summarise, these findings suggest that these different political actors act as important and influential gatekeepers who help draw and protect boundaries and thus contribute to reducing and preventing antisemitic hate speech in the Norwegian digital public sphere. However, this is a challenging task that requires awareness and knowledge of a wide range of antisemitic tropes and ideas, the thematic and political contexts in which they can occur, and how they are communicated. The fact that antisemitic hate speech is often conveyed through implicit means that it can be met with fewer objections and less restrictive countermeasures, and thus can be spread more widely (see e.g., Paasch-Colberg & Strippel, 2022).

Experiencing boundary violations

The third main finding concerns the experiences of boundary violations among Norwegian "public Jews", specifically their experiences of antisemitic hate speech, how they perceive

and deal with it, and the consequences for those targeted. The findings show that it is common to experience some form of antisemitic hate speech after being visible in the news media, especially through digital media. The fact that Jews perceive and experience antisemitism as widespread in the Norwegian digital public sphere is not surprising, particularly in light of the transnational quantitative survey of European Jews, which found that 89 per cent of respondents identified the internet and social media as a main arena for manifestations of antisemitism today (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). While there are no corresponding figures for Norway, the findings of this thesis can help explain why many Norwegian Jews perceive antisemitism to be on the rise (Moe, 2022). Similarly, qualitative research on experiences of online racism has also shown that being exposed to hate appears to be an almost inevitable and normalised aspect of being online (e.g., Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019).

In addition, and similar to other studies on experiences of hate, whether online or offline, the findings show that antisemitic hate speech can cause emotional harm (e.g., Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Ortiz, 2019). However, the study also reveals that the Jewish minority voices have different strategies for dealing with such experiences, which means that experiences of online antisemitism have not prevented them from engaging in public debates through the news media. On the contrary, the findings demonstrate that the Jewish minority voices have both agency and resilience, as their experiences and awareness of antisemitism have motivated them to speak out and share their perspectives, with the overall aim of reducing prejudice. Consequently, the active resistance of Jewish minority voices to antisemitism and other forms of prejudice and hate can be seen as a way of challenging social boundaries such as inequality, discrimination, and exclusion at a societal level (see also Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022).

Implications

This thesis has argued that a sociological boundary perspective is useful for media studies in general, and for the study of hate speech in digital media in particular, for two main reasons: First, to shed light on processes of inclusion and exclusion of political positions and viewpoints, in particular how the symbolic boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate speech, or free speech and hate speech, are often neither clear nor fixed but subject to struggle between different actors in an increasingly extensive, complex and digital public sphere. Second, to illuminate how such boundaries are pushed and drawn, or not drawn, can have

consequences for the inclusion and exclusion of minority groups (Alexander, 2006; Enjolras, 2017; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Midtbøen et al., 2017).

Following the rise of digital media as a major arena for public participation and debate, the wide range of platforms and participatory services that make up the digital public sphere can, in this view, be described as "a key site for boundary-making" (see also Bleich & van der Veen, 2022). As previous research has demonstrated, the structural shift to a digital public sphere has given many more and different individuals and political groups the power and opportunity to voice their opinions (Gripsrud et al., 2010; Schäfer, 2015). However, it has also led to growing concern and research into various discriminatory and exclusionary online communication practices and how such content can be dealt with (Bliuc et al., 2018; European Commission, 2016; Iginio et al., 2015; Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Kalsnes & Ihlebæk, 2021; Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021; Singer, 2011). Furthermore, although less explored in the literature, studies have also shown that minorities are often exposed to prejudice and hate online and are therefore forced to deal with it in different ways (e.g., Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019, 2021b).

In this thesis, boundary-making has been used as an overarching concept, suggesting that all of these processes - the pushing and drawing of boundaries and the experiences of boundary violations - should be seen as (discursive) power struggles in which many different actors are involved in shaping both symbolic and social boundaries in the digital public sphere. This thesis argues that how such boundary-making takes place has implications for the power and legitimacy of the political actors in question and for the inclusion or exclusion of minorities. Ultimately, this can also affect liberal democracy, as the spread of hate speech can undermine core values of diversity, equality, and solidarity, while at the same time, over-regulation can undermine free speech.

For extremist and antisemitic actors who initially had very limited access to the public sphere, digital media provide a platform, power, and opportunity to express and spread their anti-democratic and exclusionary views. In line with previous studies on how Islamist, right-wing extremists and other far-right actors communicate hateful content through digital media, this thesis illustrates that how such ideas are produced and promoted is important, as deceptive formats and covert language make the discriminatory messages less appalling, more appealing and harder to identify (e.g., Åkerlund, 2022; Daniels, 2009; Farkas et al., 2018; Wodak, 2015). In other words, by disguising their hateful ideology in various ways, their message becomes more edible and credible, and as a result, such actors contribute to pushing

the boundaries of what is considered legitimate speech. To illustrate, although the Nordic Resistance Movement is a marginal organisation in the broader Norwegian political context, we argue that by blurring the boundaries between professional news and neo-Nazi news, their right-wing extremist, antisemitic and exclusionary messages are in a sense gaining more legitimacy. Consequently, they can potentially reach new and wider audiences and thus gain more influence in the digital public sphere (see Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2021).

For other political actors - both on the (far) right and on the (far) left - who want to be part of or closer to the political mainstream, who depend to varying degrees on digital media to participate in public debate and communicate with their audiences, and who seek to gain or maintain power and legitimacy, it is important to draw discursive boundaries in a way that does not compromise what is generally accepted - or not accepted - in society. When it comes to antisemitism, there is a broad consensus that it is morally unacceptable, as this thesis also shows. Consequently, allowing (explicit) antisemitic hate speech in their comment sections, at least on a larger scale, would likely lead to scandalisation and discrediting of the political actor in question, regardless of ideological affiliation (Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020; Simonsen, 2023; Wodak, 2015a). Furthermore, the findings suggest that on both sides of the political spectrum, taking a clear stance against antisemitism functions as an important marker of being pro-democracy.

However, as also noted above, a key challenge is that antisemitic hate speech can be characterised by blurred boundaries, leaving room both for different interpretations and for it to continue to spread (see also Waxman et al., 2022). Moreover, this illustrates that awareness and in-depth knowledge of historical and contemporary antisemitic tropes and ideas are necessary to counter antisemitism in public discourse. This applies both to political and media actors who wish to contribute to reducing and preventing antisemitic hate speech online. Consequently, countermeasures should focus on identifying and preventing the proliferation of antisemitic ideas, not only on identifying the explicit and ideologically motivated antisemites (see also Gidley et al., 2020; Lenz & Geelmuyden, 2020). However, blurred boundaries also mean that there is a risk of censoring legitimate arguments if the measures taken are too restrictive.

How the symbolic boundaries of what can be said about Jews and other minority groups are perceived, pushed and drawn is important because it can both reflect and influence the social boundaries of who constitutes “us” and “them” in a given society (Alexander, 2006; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). While many studies have highlighted the crucial role of the

established media in the inclusion and exclusion of minority groups, less attention has been paid to the role of digital media in such boundary-making processes (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Bleich & van der Veen, 2022; Cottle, 2000; Eide & Nikunen, 2011; Luengo & Ihlebæk, 2019; van Dijk, 1991). Following this line of thought, this thesis proposes that how such discursive boundaries are pushed and drawn in the digital public sphere is also a question of the inclusion or exclusion of minorities - in public debates and in society at large.

As previous research has suggested, being the target of what is perceived as hate speech can function as a social boundary to free speech and public participation, as it can discourage people from expressing their views and lead them to withdraw from public debates (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). From a democratic perspective, this is particularly problematic if it leads to the silencing of specific groups. Although the Jewish minority voices included in the present study were not discouraged from continuing to participate in public debates despite experiencing antisemitic hate speech, which is an example of how recipients of hate speech can build resilience, others with less media experience, motivation or emotional resilience may avoid expressing their opinions. Previous research has shown that hate speech can act as a silencing mechanism, causing distress and fear not only for the targeted individual but also for other members of the minority group in question (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016). Furthermore, it is possible that a more heated and hostile public debate and a rise in hate speech could lead to fewer people wanting to engage in public debate. Following the Hamas terror attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 and Israel's subsequent warfare in Gaza, there has been a rise in antisemitism, as well as more polarised and politicised debates about where to draw the boundaries between hate speech and free speech, both in Norway and across Europe (see e.g., Njie et al., 2023; Smith, 2023).

Beyond the issue of participation in public debates, how the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate speech are pushed and drawn can have an impact on minorities' sense of belonging in society at large. Previous studies have shown that experiences of hate speech, whether online or offline, can lead to feelings of anger, exhaustion, disempowerment and exclusion (Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019). Notably, research has also demonstrated how minorities use different coping strategies to distance and protect themselves, regain a sense of agency and to actively counter prejudice and hate (Ellefsen et al., 2022; Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Nadim, 2023; Ortiz, 2019, 2021a). Nevertheless, the literature suggests that hate speech against minorities creates and contributes to inequality between minority groups and the majority population.

From a liberal democratic perspective, it can be argued that the proliferation of hate speech in digital media is not only a social problem affecting minority groups but also society at large because it undermines important values such as diversity, equality and solidarity (Alexander, 2006; Waldron, 2012). Reducing and preventing hate speech should therefore be the responsibility of society as a whole, and not just through legal measures, which tend to focus on the most explicit cases (see also Maussen & Grillo, 2014). In this context, the platforms, political actors, and media actors that constitute the digital public sphere play a crucial role. However, since the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate content - and between free speech and hate speech - can be blurred, the question of how to deal with hate in the digital public sphere also touches on the fundamental liberal democratic dilemma of how to "balance the core values of preserving freedom while limiting the harmful effects of racism" (Bleich, 2011: 3).

Suggestions for future research

By using the concepts of boundaries and boundary-making, this thesis has explored how antisemitic hate speech - as a specific form of hate speech - is expressed, perceived, experienced, and dealt with by different actors in the Norwegian digital public sphere. Future research could use the analytical framework proposed in this thesis to examine understandings of hate speech directed at other minority groups and the boundaries of legitimate speech in other contexts, including how prejudiced and hateful content is communicated and countered by different actors, and the consequences for those targeted.

As for future research on antisemitism specifically, it is worth exploring different forms and perspectives on antisemitic hate speech, as well as moderation practices, in the comment sections of mainstream online newspapers and on other digital media platforms not covered here. In general, there is also a need for more research on experiences of antisemitism in the digital public sphere, for example among younger and non-public Jews. Furthermore, on a methodological level, the findings of this thesis suggest that quantitative research on online antisemitism should build (more) on the findings of qualitative research (see also Becker & Troschke, 2023). Qualitative approaches focusing on context and nuance are needed to inform research aimed at measuring the extent and improving the understanding of online antisemitism, possibly through a mixed-methods approach. This is important because studies that are primarily quantitative tend not to take sufficient account of the diversity and blurriness of antisemitic hate speech and may therefore underestimate its prevalence (e.g.,

Riedl et al., 2022; Zannettou et al., 2020). This may also apply to research on other types of hate speech.

Considering that ambiguity and coded language seem to be important aspects of how hate speech is communicated in the digital public sphere, research should focus more on such boundaries and how the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate speech is understood by different actors (e.g., Åkerlund, 2022; Paasch-Colberg & Strippel, 2022). This is particularly relevant as blurred boundaries pose a major challenge for content and comment moderation, whether this is done by humans or through automated hate speech detection. Finally, limiting the understanding of racist and hate speech to that which is directly and explicitly expressed fails to recognise the seemingly widespread but more subtle forms of racism, prejudice and hate that circulate online and which nonetheless contribute to inequality (see also Matamoros-Fernández, 2017; Nadim, 2023; Nikunen, 2021; Ortiz, 2021b).

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Recontextualising the news

How antisemitic discourses are constructed in extreme far-right alternative media

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Abstract
This study explores how an extreme far-right alternative media site uses content from professional media to convey uncivil news with an antisemitic message. Analytically, it rests on a critical discourse analysis of 231 news items, originating from established national and international news sources, published on *Frihetskamp* from 2011–2018. In the study, we explore how news items are recontextualised to portray both overt and covert antisemitic discourses, and we identify four antisemitic representations that are reinforced through the selection and adjustment of news: Jews as powerful, as intolerant and anti-liberal, as exploiters of victimhood, and as inferior. These conspiratorial and exclusionary ideas, also known from historical Nazi propaganda, are thus reproduced by linking them to contemporary societal and political contexts and the current news agenda. We argue that this kind of recontextualised, uncivil news can be difficult to detect in a digital public sphere.

Keywords: alternative media, antisemitism, borderline discourse, recontextualisation, uncivility

Introduction

It is a well-established fact that the Internet has enabled hate groups to engage in a variety of communicative practices, including building online communities and networks; providing information to their supporters; mobilising to activism; engaging in disinformation, propaganda, and hate campaigns; and recruiting new members (Brown, 2009; Caiani & Parenti, 2016; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Ekman, 2019; Haanshuus & Jupskås, 2017). In this article, we explore practices of online uncivility by investigating how uncivility is conveyed through news produced by uncivil actors – particularly news published on the neo-Nazi website *Frihetskamp* [*Freedom Fight*]. The site is owned and run by the Norwegian division of the organisation Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), which represents an extremist antisemitic worldview and aims to stop and reverse all immigration and the "occupation" of what they describe as the "global Zionistic elite" (Frihetskamp.net, 2016).[1]

Haanshuus, B. P., & Ihlebæk, K. A. (2021). Recontextualising news: How antisemitic discourses are constructed in extreme far-right alternative media. *Nordicom Review*, *42*(S1), 37–50. https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0005

This article addresses *Frihetskamp* as an extreme far-right alternative media site. Several studies have explored how far-right alternative media has increasingly managed to impact online agendas through uncivil and exclusionary discourses about immigration and Islam (Benkler et al., 2018; Ekman, 2018; Holt, 2019; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017; Sandberg & Ihlebæk, 2019). Furthermore, previous research has shown how such sites mimic the features of professional news media sites and that they often select and amend stories from the established media (Ekman, 2019). In this article, we aim to explore how far-right alternative media function as an arena for antisemitic discourse, and we ask: How are uncivil discourses about Jews constructed through news published on *Frihetskamp*? More specifically, we focus on the process of recontextualisation, by which we mean how news from professional news organisations is placed in an uncivil discursive context and consequently changes meaning, thus becoming "uncivil news". Also, we look at practices of alteration, where news items are manipulated in small but significant ways to enhance the ideological stance of the site. These amendments, we argue, might not necessarily be noticed by audiences confronted by single news items shared on social media, but the amendments can function as important signifiers for the organisation's followers. A point of departure, then, is that even though NRM is an uncivil actor, their uncivil message may be conveyed in more or less implicit and explicit ways on *Frihetskamp*. As Krzyżanowski and Ledin (2017: 567) have pointed out, uncivil actors often communicate through "borderline discourses", implying how hateful and exclusionary views that are in stark contrast to liberal-democratic ideals are represented through what apparently looks like civil communicative forms.

Methodologically, this study is inspired by Reisigl and Wodak's (2001, 2016) discourse-historical approach – in particular, the socio-diagnostic critique, which aims to uncover the persuasive or "manipulative" character of discursive practices, whether manifest or latent. Based on a strategic selection of 231 news items originating from established news sources and published on *Frihetskamp*, we analyse how stories are amended to portray both overt and covert antisemitic discourses. On a theoretical level, the study is inspired by perspectives on historical and contemporary antisemitic Nazi discourses (Botsch & Kopke, 2014; Burrin, 2005; Herf, 2006; Macklin, 2014; Welch, 2002) and particularly how this kind of uncivility can be explored through far-right news production.

Although *Frihetskamp* as a news site might be described as a marginal phenomenon with limited visibility and reach, we argue that it is of great importance to explore how extremist actors construct and disseminate uncivil content. This is particularly so because antisemitism appears to be on the rise in Europe and the US. Recent reports have emphasised how online media plays an important role in this development (Anti-Defamation League, 2018; Community Security Trust, 2018, 2020; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018), but so far, the topic has been given limited scholarly attention. We argue that it is of particular concern that the website in question to a large degree mimics the visual layout and content of professional online newspapers, which potentially can mislead audiences who are not necessarily supportive of NRM's cause, but who are unfamiliar with the symbols and language of neo-Nazis. Furthermore, by utilising news produced by legitimate news media that adheres to professional ethical standards, NRM constructs their uncivil message in a way that can be difficult to detect. In a Norwegian context, there have been several examples of how news content

from *Frihetskamp* has been shared on social media by people presumably unaware of the site's extremist stance (Klungtveit, 2020). By deconstructing news published on *Frihetskamp*, this study contributes with knowledge concerning how antisemitism is expressed in high-choice digital media environments, where the threshold for producing and distributing content is low and where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between civil and uncivil information providers.

Uncivil news in far-right alternative media

The digital media environment is characterised by a dramatic proliferation of actors that produce and distribute content (Chadwick, 2013; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). While online platforms undoubtedly have enabled valuable democratic participation from new groups in society (Papacharissi, 2004), the rise of online uncivility and hate speech has been identified as a democratic problem (European Commission, 2016; United Nations, 2019). Previous research has indicated that far-right actors have developed active media strategies to gain media attention (Baugut & Neumann, 2019) and that they utilise online communication structures to produce and distribute uncivil content to gain visibility and impact in the online environment (Caiani & Parenti, 2016; Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

In this article, we focus on uncivility in the context of far-right alternative media, meaning websites consisting of hyper-partisan and ideologically driven news (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Heft et al., 2019; Holt, 2019; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021). The literature on alternative media has traditionally been rooted in social movement theory, which emphasises that alternative media should strengthen democratic goals through participation and empowerment of marginalised groups (Atton, 2002; Haas, 2004). In recent years, however, there has been an increase in what can be described as right-wing to far-right alternative news media, characterised partly of uncivil and undemocratic discourses, specifically when it comes to topics such as immigration, integration, and Islam (Atkinson & Berg, 2012; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Holt, 2019; Nygaard, 2019, 2020). Whether far-right alternative media based on exclusionary views should be termed alternative has consequently been questioned (Atton, 2006; Padovani, 2016). In this article, we refer to Holt and colleagues (2019: 863), who have proposed a non-normative definition of alternative media: "Alternative news media represent a proclaimed and/or (self) perceived corrective, opposing the overall tendency of public discourse emanating from what is perceived as the dominant mainstream media in a given system". Following this definition, a key trait of alternative media is the relational aspect and how the term alternative is used to identify an oppositional position. In the case of *Frihetskamp*, their counter-position to the "lying media" is stated on their website through the slogan "In times of universal deceit and lies, telling the truth is a revolutionary act". It is also worth noting that "the lying press" (or *Lügenpresse*) is a historical term that was used by the Nazi regime to discredit the news media and to undermine public trust (Koliska & Assmann, 2019).

In this article we argue that far-right alternative media can be viewed as a form of "bottom-up incivility" (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017: 569), referring to how online platforms are used by amateurs and activists to express controversial, hateful, and extremist views to a wider audience. Following Krzyżanowski and Ledin's (2017) line of thought,

we propose that far-right alternative media can be viewed as uncivil arenas because of the undemocratic or racist ideologies that constitute the basis for their practices. In contrast, professional online news media structured around journalistic professionalism and institutionalised ethics can be characterised as civil arenas of communication. The boundaries between what is deemed professional or non-professional – and civil or uncivil – is of course not clear-cut, or easily detectable in many cases (Carlson, 2015). Crude tabloid journalism, for instance, might break with the normative ideals of professional journalism and contribute to uncivil discourses about certain groups in society. Also, news published on what can be described as uncivil arenas may be conveyed through expressions that might, at first glance, seem civil. For instance, hateful discourses might be disguised by far-right actors by mimicking "real news" (Farkas & Neumayer, 2020). Studies have shown how far-right actors, rather than making up stories, often depend heavily on content from established news sources (Ekman, 2019; Haller & Holt, 2019; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017). Consequently, what can be described as a process of recontextualisation occurs, which is when an element is taken out of one context and used in another, subsequently giving it a new meaning (Ekman, 2019; Krzyżanowski, 2016; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). In the context of this article, recontextualisation refers to when a news story originally published on what can be described as a civil arena (established media) is republished on an uncivil arena (far-right alternative media) and is thus ideologically re-positioned. Furthermore, the original news item can be adjusted through extensive or small symbolic editorial amendments – for instance, through changing the headline, a picture, or parts of the text (Ekman, 2019). As a consequence, seemingly civil news items are manipulated into uncivil news, by which we mean news published on uncivil arenas with the purpose of implicitly or explicitly conveying hateful discourses about particular groups in society.

To be able to understand how uncivil discourses about Jews are constructed through news on *Frihetskamp*, it is necessary to place our study within a historical context on how antisemitic discourses have been expressed both overtly and covertly.

Antisemitic representations in Nazi propaganda: A brief historical overview

Hostility and prejudice against Jews have deep historical roots, from ancient times to present day. The vast literature has demonstrated, on the one hand, how the phenomenon has changed and adapted through history and, on the other hand, how many myths and stereotypes about Jews have been reproduced (Chazan, 1997; Laqueur, 2006). For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to highlight some antisemitic representations that are well known from Nazi propaganda.

At the core of Nazi ideology is the conspiratorial idea of a hidden, powerful Jewish network aiming for world domination. In the years before the persecution and systematic killing of six million Jews, they were portrayed as influential scapegoats responsible for the downfall of Germany. Jews were seen as an alien element and were held accountable for all negative trends in society, including cultural, economic, and political grievances (Herf, 2006; Welch, 2002). Furthermore, Jews were regularly presented as evil, money-grabbing capitalists or communists, and the propaganda on racial issues often framed Jews as criminals (Welch, 2002). Nazi propaganda of the 1940s presented Germany's

war against the Allies and the fight against the Jews as a revenge-and-defence tactic. This "radical antisemitism" was based on the belief that the Jews were a cohesive, politically active, and powerful entity, and if not identified and destroyed, "international Jewry" would eradicate the German people (Herf, 2006: 7). In this narrative, Germans were portrayed as victims and Jews as the ultimate enemy. Moreover, Jews have also frequently been depicted as parasites, rats, carriers of infection, germs, and plagues, or as poisonous demons – all dehumanising metaphors that point to the need for extermination (Burrin, 2005; Welch, 2002).

Following World War II, antisemitism is no longer accepted in the public sphere but continues to be an essential part of far-right ideology – in particular within the antidemocratic extreme right. In this context, Botsch and Kopke (2014) have argued that antisemitism has undergone a process of transformation, in which euphemistic language plays an important role. They distinguish between "primary antisemitism" – or the continuation of the traditional racist antisemitism of the Nazis – and "secondary antisemitism" – when antisemitic ideas are concealed by reversing the roles of victims and perpetrators. In this regard, a common antisemitic sentiment is to deny or downplay the severity of the Holocaust and accuse the Jews of exploiting their victim status. Other strategies of concealment include imitating the language of liberal democracy to legitimise exclusionary sentiments without making use of traditional racist argumentation, or replacing the word Jew with labels such as "Zionist", "globalist", or "international money power", so that antisemitic ideas are reproduced without explicitly mentioning Jews (Botsch & Kopke, 2014; Macklin, 2014). Simonsen (2020: 655) has suggested that far-right actors who seek mass support tend to moderate themselves and use coded language more often than militant "racist-revolutionaries", such as NRM.

Case, data, and method

The website under scrutiny, *Frihetskamp*, is the main digital media platform of the Norwegian division of NRM, which is the largest and most prominent neo-Nazi organisation in the Nordic countries. Originally established in Sweden in 1997 under the name Swedish Resistance Movement, the Swedish parent organisation merged with its smaller offspring organisations in Finland, Norway, and Denmark in 2016 (Ravndal, 2018). While NRM continues to be primarily a Swedish organisation, it has in the past few years become more visible and increasingly gained attention from media and authorities in Norway as well (Bjørgo & Gjelsvik, 2018). All of NRM's national divisions have websites in their own languages, with the (current) Norwegian division and its website first appearing in 2011. The organisation has an active media strategy of filming their own activities, provoking confrontations, and offering daily coverage of domestic and foreign news (see also Askanius, 2019). In addition, they frequently publish podcasts, essays on historical events and topics, reports about their offline activities, commentary and opinion pieces written by NRM members, and letters to the editor written by guest writers.

In the analysis, our aim has been to expose how antisemitism is conveyed through recontextualised news – meaning news stories that originate from the established media– on *Frihetskamp*. Inspired by Reisigl and Wodak's (2001, 2016) discourse-historical approach – more specifically, the socio-diagnostic critique, which aims to uncover the

manifest or latent discriminatory and "manipulative" character of discursive practices – we used an exploratory, inductive three-step procedure.

First, as proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2016), we identified a specific set of content on *Frihetskamp*: news that explicitly concerned Jews. We then selected a strategic sample of news items published on *Frihetskamp* by using the search word jød* [Jew*]. Using the search function on the website, we consequently collected all articles containing the search word published on *Frihetskamp* between 2011 and 2018 ($N = 675$). As we went through the material, it became clear that *Frihetskamp* linked to material from a variety of sources, including other alternative media sites, content from social media platforms, and other online sources. Both researchers then went through the articles and identified stories that linked to international and national established news media ($N = 231$), by which we mean professional news sites with an ascribed editor and that adheres to an established ethical code of conduct.[2]

Second, to uncover discursive strategies – more specifically, to examine in more detail how news stories recontextualised from established media convey antisemitic representations – we used the analytical questions proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) to conduct a close reading of the texts:

- How are Jews and "the Jewish" referred to?
- What characteristics, traits, and features are attributed to them?
- What arguments are used to justify and legitimise exclusionary views on Jews?
- From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributions, and arguments expressed?
- Are the exclusionary and discriminatory utterances articulated overtly or covertly?

Our aim was not to conduct a comprehensive linguistic analysis and answer these questions separately but rather to use them as a guideline to illuminate how news stories from civil actors are placed in new discursive contexts and consequently become uncivil news with an antisemitic message.

Third, we examined how specific linguistic means are used to alter news and thus function to convey antisemitic messages both explicitly and implicitly. The examples highlighted in the analysis below illustrate specific strategies and represent a subset of news stories that are altered in similar ways and thus convey a similar message.

Analysis: The antisemitic representations in uncivil news

Our findings show that there are four distinct forms of antisemitic representations that stand out when news items from established sources are selected and recontextualised by NRM on *Frihetskamp*: 1) the Jews as powerful, 2) the Jews as intolerant and anti-liberal, 3) the Jews as exploiters of victimhood, and 4) the Jews as inferior. In the following text, we outline these representations in more detail and point out how they are constructed around specific traits, features, and arguments about Jews that are well known from historical Nazi discourse. We also explore how specific forms of alterations that are used when recontextualising news stories function to convey antisemitic messages in both overt and covert ways.

The powerful Jews

The first representation we found is that Jews are portrayed as powerful actors aiming for world domination. By recontextualising news stories about politics and societal affairs from the established press, in which (alleged) Jewish individuals or organisations are involved, NRM revives old antisemitic ideas known from traditional Nazi propaganda. On *Frihetskamp*, Jews are characterised as influential scapegoats who work behind the scenes and are responsible for what is deemed destructive trends in society, including increased immigration, dissolution of traditional gender roles, biased media, and restrictions on freedom of expression.

To illustrate this point, recontextualised news stories about investor and philanthropist George Soros echo the historical and conflicting antisemitic myth of Jews as powerful, corrupt capitalists who are also linked to left-wing ideology. The focus of these news stories is on how Soros and his organisation, Open Society Foundations, have financed and organised political initiatives, including immigration, anti-racist campaigns and riots, and demonstrations for gay rights and women's rights. While the mainstream media sources (e.g., Melén, 2018; Riddell, 2015) simply refer to Soros with labels such as "Hungarian-American businessman" or "liberal billionaire", NRM systematically refers to him as a "Jewish multibillionaire" on *Frihetskamp*. By emphasising his alleged Jewish identity and connecting it to features such as being rich, influential, and leftist, NRM has made Soros into a symbol of Jews as the ultimate political enemy. Similarly, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and non-governmental organisations such as Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center, who monitor and prevent right-wing extremism, are also identified as Jewish and portrayed as particularly powerful opponents that actively promote liberal immigration policies and strict hate speech legislation. The overall argument is that these influential Jewish actors work to undermine the ideological cause of NRM and others who share their worldview. While it can be argued that emphasising the "Jewishness" of the actors in question makes the antisemitic message quite explicit, it may also function as a way of promoting a comprehensive antisemitic conspiracy theory about Jewish power by simply referring to individuals, organisations, or institutions as "Jewish".

Also part of this discourse in which Jews are attributed power, we found that media in general, or specific media enterprises such as Bonnier and news outlets such as *The New York Times*, are referred to as Jewish or Jewish-owned. Identifying the media as Jewish thus functions as a way of labelling the established press as a lying and powerful enemy that is suppressing "nationalists" and free speech, as well as promoting a left-wing, "cultural Marxist" agenda. Furthermore, the emphasis on media as Jewish or Jewish-owned reproduces the antisemitic myth of Jews as particularly influential in media and, consequently, also the public debate on politics. This points to the paradoxical relationship far-right alternative news media has to the established press, which is to them both a useful source and a useful enemy.

The intolerant and anti-liberal Jews

The second antisemitic representation that is reinforced through the recontextualisation of news is Jews as intolerant and against liberal democratic values. By recontextualising news from established media about hate speech and other political issues, including

news coverage about Israel, NRM presents themselves as tolerant and Jews as illiberal opponents of the democratic system and democratic values such as freedom of speech and equality. This is also connected to ideas about Jewish power, but as emphasised in previous research on antisemitic and extremist rhetoric (Macklin, 2014), the use of a seemingly democratic language that focuses on the illiberal or undemocratic characteristics of Jews functions as a way of legitimising exclusionary manifestations without making use of traditional racist argumentation.

To reinforce this discourse, mainstream news coverage on antisemitic hate speech and proposals to ban Holocaust denial are recontextualised. More specifically, on *Frihetskamp*, news stories on these topics are used to "prove" that freedom of expression is limited and that Jews are at the forefront of pushing such restrictions. This can be illustrated by a news story on how the president of the World Jewish Congress has criticised a Hungarian business magazine for reproducing antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish financial power and asked the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, to condemn it. While the original story from Israeli news outlet *i24 News* focused on Orbán's dismissal of the request, NRM used the story and a quote by Orbán to implicitly argue that Jews – in this case represented by the World Jewish Congress – are "restricting freedom of speech and freedom of the press". Other similar news stories on *Frihetskamp* focus on how Jewish leaders and politicians are working to introduce legislation that "serves Jewish interests", such as criminalising hate speech and Holocaust denial. The overall argument is that it should be legitimate and legal to do what NRM refer to as "criticising" Jews, Jewish power, and Jewish corruption. However, since Jews control the media and are powerful in politics, they also control the public debate and legislation on hate speech – and they do it in a hypocritical and excluding way that threatens freedom of speech. In a similar manner, NRM also recontextualises news stories to claim that Jews are at the forefront of attempting to limit the American constitutional right to bear arms, and Jews are framed as strong opponents of elected politicians such as President Donald Trump and the right-wing government in Austria, thus insinuating that Jews do not respect the democratic system, at least not as long as it is governed by right-wing politicians. These ideas are also implicitly or explicitly connected to the theory of a Jewish conspiracy aiming for world domination and deliberately seeking to break down society.

Also part of this seemingly democratic language is a common claim or insinuation that Jews discriminate against others. In this context, mainstream news coverage on Israeli politics is recontextualised to suggest that Jews have a racist and exclusionary worldview, in this case represented by "the Jewish State of Israel". To illustrate, while a news story from Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* cites the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, saying, "Israel is prepared for mass immigration [of European Jews]" after the recent terrorist attacks aimed at Jewish targets in Paris and Copenhagen (Andersen, 2015), the news story on *Frihetskamp* emphasises that "Israel is ready for mass immigration, but only of Jews". The quote by Netanyahu is thus slightly adjusted to highlight NRM's view of Jews as discriminatory. Other recontextualised news articles refer to the discrimination and segregation of Palestinians and the so-called "race laws" implemented by Israel that differentiates between Jews and non-Jews, to frame Jews (in general) as racists and hypocrites.

The Jews as exploiters of victimhood

The third antisemitic representation is Jews as exploiters of victimhood. By recontextualising news stories from the established press on antisemitism, racism, and hate crime aimed at Jewish targets, NRM – often in an implicit way – trivialises or denies that Jews have been victims of violence and hate. While the mainstream media sources that they make use of describe the details of and reactions to terrorist attacks and hate crime targeting Jewish individuals or institutions in a neutral and civil manner, the recontextualised news on *Frihetskamp* characterises Jews as easily violated and focus on how they deliberately exaggerate and exploit their (historical) status as victims, which is a form of so-called secondary antisemitism (Botsch & Kopke, 2014).

This narrative was particularly visible in early 2015, after the terrorist attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher supermarket in Paris and a synagogue in Copenhagen. To illustrate, in an article from Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten,* the leader of the Jewish Community of Oslo said that "Norway is one of the better countries for Jews to live in, but we are a bit more vulnerable than most Norwegians. Extremists depend on creating enemy images, and Jews are one of the most central [translated]" (Sætran, 2015). When this news story was recontextualised on *Frihetskamp*, the quote was cut and only included "We [the Jews] are a bit more vulnerable than most Norwegians". Further, the news story on *Frihetskamp* highlighted that Jews "receive special protection". Other similar stories focus on how Jews demand special treatment. Although not necessarily overtly articulated, a general argument throughout these news stories is that Jews use their alleged experience and position as victims to strengthen their influence and gain benefits.

Similarly, a news story originally from Norwegian newspaper *Vårt Land* [*Our Country*] on how "well-known Norwegian Jews are worried" about the increasing threat against Jewish targets was recontextualised to trivialise the Jewish experience of insecurity (Lindvåg, 2015). When the news story was covered on *Frihetskamp*, quotation marks were used to change the meaning of the word "worried", thus insinuating that the Jews mentioned were worried for no reason. The explanation for this argument is found in other news articles suggesting that Jewish individuals are responsible for staging antisemitic hate crimes. In these stories, NRM consistently refers to the hate crimes using quotations marks.

When recontextualising news on these topics, NRM systematically refers to antisemitism and hate crime with quotation marks or as "so-called" or "alleged" antisemitic events – small amendments and linguistic means that are used to express irony or doubt. In its most extreme form, this type of ironic and trivialising language is also used to covertly communicate Holocaust denial. When recontextualising news about the Holocaust, NRM refers to it as "Holocaust" – *with* quotation marks. People claiming to be survivors of the Holocaust are referred to as "survivors" (also with quotation marks) or "so-called survivors". Other examples of this type of language include phrases such as "Six million Jews were supposedly killed during World War II" and a story about how a former guard in Auschwitz, who is now convicted of being an accomplice in genocide, "admits that he worked as a chef but has never seen gas chambers during his time there". While the mainstream media sources these news stories are based on never question the historical facts of the Holocaust, news on *Frihetskamp* insinuates that the genocide is exaggerated or that it never happened. The overall argument is that the Jews themselves

are responsible for the threats against them and that they are lying about their vulnerability and exploiting their alleged victimhood.

The inferior Jews

A fourth antisemitic representation is when Jews are presented as inferior. By this we mean news where the most explicit and crude antisemitic manifestations occur, such as when Jews are referred to with dehumanising metaphors or racist or prejudiced slurs. A general finding in our study is that relatively few examples of such explicit or derogatory antisemitic content appear in the news published on *Frihetskamp*. A key tendency is that when such explicit uncivil expressions occur, NRM does not present it as their own view. Rather they report what others have said that is explicitly antisemitic, thus disguising the uncivil message as presented by others.

Examples of such dehumanising metaphors and racist slurs on *Frihetskamp* include news reports about a Dutch professor who has referred to Jews as "evil parasites", an American left-wing activist who was arrested for tagging "Die Jew Rats" on a synagogue, and a Norwegian hip-hop artist who was reported for saying "fuck Jews" from stage. The news coverage also included examples of dehumanising language set in a historical context. A story on a recently published book about famous Norwegian author Knut Hamsun, known to have expressed sympathies for Nazi Germany, highlighted a quote by Hamsun's wife, Marie, which echoes the dehumanising antisemitic propaganda of the 1940s calling for extermination: "Jews are the devils behind every war; they are the rotten flesh of a human's body". Other examples include news reports about prominent individuals who – intentionally or unintentionally – have expressed explicit racist or prejudiced ideas about Jews and thus are being accused of antisemitism. This can be illustrated by a news story on how famous footballer Mario Balotelli posted a discriminatory picture of the video game character Mario on his Instagram account. The picture claims that "He [Mario] is an Italian plumber" who "jumps like a black man, and grabs coins like a Jew". Balotelli's social media post has consequently been criticised for being racist and reproducing the antisemitic stereotype of Jews as greedy. Balotelli has later apologised and argued that it was supposed to be an anti-racist joke. On *Frihetskamp*, however, the underlying argument is that he should not have apologised and that Jews lack humour and are easily violated. By simply referring to quotes by others, NRM can convey explicit antisemitic language – including dehumanising, racist, and prejudiced sentiments – without it being obvious that they are an inherently antisemitic and uncivil news publisher.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored how antisemitic discourses are constructed on *Frihetskamp*, a far-right alternative media site that can be characterised as an uncivil arena because of its antidemocratic and exclusionary stance. Our point of departure was that far-right alternative media, which mimics the outline and features of established news media, can be viewed as a form of "bottom-up incivility" (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017: 569), in which amateurs and activists express hateful and extreme views through the production of news. Previous research has indicated that the organisation under scrutiny has

an active media strategy (Askanius, 2019). Inspired by Reisigl and Wodak's (2001, 2016) discourse-historical approach, our aim has been to uncover the manifest or latent discriminatory and manipulative character of such discursive practices by illuminating how NRM recontextualises and adjusts content from legitimate news providers, thus transforming civil news into uncivil news. We have argued that by recontextualising and adjusting news stories from the established press, NRM presents news coverage that constitutes an exclusionary antisemitic worldview in both overt and covert ways.

This study has identified four antisemitic representations that are reinforced through the selection and recontextualisation of news on *Frihetskamp*: the Jews as powerful, as intolerant and anti-liberal, as exploiters of victimhood, and as inferior. These exclusionary and conspiratorial ideas, also known from historical Nazi propaganda, are thus reproduced on *Frihetskamp* by connecting them to contemporary societal and political contexts and the current news agenda. The overall argument on *Frihetskamp* is that Jews are the ultimate enemy and the common denominator behind all development deemed destructive in society, including immigration, multiculturalism, financial power, and restrictions on freedom of speech (see also Simonsen, 2020). In other words, and as pointed out by Herf (2006: 183) in his study on Nazi propaganda of the 1940s, "the Jews are guilty of everything". However, this overarching message is presented in bits and pieces throughout the news coverage – often by implicit means. Consequently, without readers having knowledge about historical antisemitic manifestations, the uncivility of the news about Jews can be difficult to discover. Furthermore, by imitating the format of professional news providers and using stories from such sources, NRM reproduces their antisemitic message through the words of others. Our study also found that when explicit derogatory antisemitic expressions – such as dehumanising metaphors and racist slurs – are conveyed, they often occur in news stories where others are reported as expressing them. In this way, and as similarly emphasised by Macklin (2014), NRM seeks to legitimise their antisemitic worldview without making use of explicit racist argumentation. Avoiding or distancing themselves from explicit hostile language reduces the risk of legal sanctions – for instance, through hate speech legislation – and it makes their antisemitic message more covert and difficult to identify.

The fact that the news coverage on *Frihetskamp* is based on actual news from the established media and with traceable sources may create a sense of legitimacy that blurs the boundaries between the civil and uncivil. The alternative news site under scrutiny can thus be considered an example of a borderline discourse of uncivility (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017), where hateful and exclusionary views are represented through what might seem like a civil communicative form. This is of great concern, because as the digital sphere has become more complicated and messy, and is a place where a great variety of actors compete for our attention, uncivil actors might reach new audiences and manage to infiltrate the social media sphere with uncivil content. This problem has been recognised by global media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, and recent measures have been taken to exclude uncivil actors from spreading their content through their channels. Nevertheless, it is likely that uncivility will continue to spread online, and consequently it is important to pay attention to where and how uncivil actors disseminate their harmful messages.

There are some limitations to this study that must be addressed. We have only investigated news items which explicitly mention the word "Jew". Future research should look

at how antisemitic sentiments may also be expressed in even more implicit ways – for instance by using code words such as Zionist, globalist, or other dog-whistle strategies – as well as by examining how antisemitic discourses are constructed in other forms of content published on the site, such as historical essays, podcasts, and radio programmes. Finally, we currently know little about how *Frihetskamp* is used by NRM's members, to what degree they manage to gain visibility and impact amongst other user groups, or what kind of role they play within wider Nordic or international far-right networks. This kind of knowledge is necessary to identify how antisemitism takes places and potentially reaches new publics in a fast-changing digital media environment.

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Notes

1. All quotations from *Frihetskamp* – and the originating articles – have been translated by the authors.
2. An overview of the news items can be made available by the authors as an Excel file with URLs upon request.

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Freedom of expression or censorship of antisemitic hate speech?

Editorial and audience perspectives on comment moderation in far-right alternative media

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Abstract

Taking the dilemma between freedom of expression and censorship of antisemitic hate speech as a point of departure, this article explores how three prominent and controversial Norwegian far-right alternative media perceive and perform comment moderation and how editorial and audience perspectives on the issue correspond. Based on a critical discourse analysis of interviews with key staff members and a strategic selection of comment sections, the article demonstrates how both moderators and debaters understand the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate expressions and how transgressive content should be dealt with. The article argues that when it comes to regulating comment sections, these oppositional media actors are not so alternative after all. The study illustrates how comment moderation is crucial for all actors who seek to obtain or protect their legitimacy, regardless of their (counter-) position in the public sphere. While there is widespread agreement on antisemitic hate speech as illegitimate, there is, however, more tolerance for generalising statements about Muslims and immigrants, which underpins these actors' antagonism towards these groups.

KEYWORDS
far right, alternative media, comment moderation, online comments, editorial control, audience participation, hate speech, antisemitism, freedom of expression, anti-Muslim prejudice

Introduction

Over the last few decades, the far right has undergone an ideological development in which freedom of expression and opposition to antisemitism have emerged as two crucial but conflicting values. The starting point for this study is an observation of an ongoing debate across the three most prominent alternative media in Norway, which, in addition to being controversial actors, can be characterised as "anti-Islamic" and part of the transnational far-right political landscape (Berntzen, 2020). All three sites have published editorials condemning antisemitism, arguing that it is illegitimate and harmful. However, this does not mean anti-Jewish expressions have been eradicated, nor is there agreement on how to deal with such views. In 2018, the editor-in-chief of *Resett* discussed the dilemma between advocating for unlimited freedom of expression and censorship of antisemitic hate speech, arguing that "the principle of an open comment section" is more important. He further encouraged debaters to "take extra good care of the Jews in Norway" and to contribute to constructive discussions without making antisemitic remarks since the Jewish minority is threatened from many sides (Lurås, 2018). Shortly after, *Rights.no* harshly criticised *Resett* for lack of moderation and for allowing "grotesque Jew-hatred" and support for Nazism in their comment sections (Storhaug, 2018). In 2019, *Document* also criticised *Resett* for giving a platform to people promoting antisemitism and Holocaust denial, both online and at a public debate meeting, arguing that antisemites have the same view on free speech as Islamists (Rustad, 2019).

With this debate as a backdrop, the present article explores the arguments used and the tensions that arise when the dilemma between defending freedom of expression and denouncing antisemitism is dealt with by editorial staff and discussed by audience members in the comment sections of these alternative media. This is of importance because, in addition to informing discussions on where and how antisemitic hate speech is expressed in a fragmented and digital public sphere, this case can illuminate how alternative media, which by definition "represent a proclaimed and/or (self-) perceived corrective" to the public discourse and the dominant mainstream media (Holt et al., 2019, p. 862), perceive and perform comment moderation in general. While many studies have demonstrated why and how mainstream media handle their comment sections (e.g. Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Singer et al., 2011), less attention has been paid to how this unfolds in alternative media. Examining whether, why and how new media actors control the debates they facilitate is essential for understanding the wider dynamics of the digital public sphere. Given their stated editorial

position on antisemitism, the alternative media investigated can function as gatekeepers who can prevent this specific type of hate speech.

Far-right alternative media represent an interesting case because compared to the mainstream media they criticise, they presumably have different understandings of where the boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable should be set. Of particular interest is that these sites may attract highly diverse audiences, from mainstream and immigration-critical to extremist voices. Since the dilemma in question has sparked debates among readers, this case can also provide valuable insights into the relationship between the editorial line of such media and their audiences. While studies of editorial control in mainstream media have shown how moderators and participants in such online debates have different expectations of how moderation should be carried out (Løvlie et al., 2018; Robinson, 2010), research on audience participation in far-right alternative media is scarce (Holt, 2020). Taking the dilemma between freedom of expression and censorship of antisemitism as a point of departure, this article contributes to this literature by posing the following research questions:

1. How does far-right alternative media perceive and perform comment moderation?

2. How do audience perspectives correspond with editorial views?

The overall aim is to contribute with knowledge on the different positions and arguments used about comment moderation of hate speech across and within alternative media, which in recent years have influenced the digital public sphere (Holt, 2020; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021). Of particular interest is whether the arguments reflect interventionist or non-interventionist approaches to comment moderation (Ihlebæk et al., 2013; Løvlie et al., 2018). Based on a critical discourse analysis of interviews with key editorial staff members and a selection of comment sections that address the dilemma outlined above, the article demonstrates how both facilitators of and participants in the comment sections in these alternative media understand the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate expressions, how transgressive content should be dealt with, and the risks associated with specific approaches to comment moderation. The article argues that when it comes to regulating comment sections, these oppositional media actors are not so alternative after all, as the findings illustrate how comment moderation is crucial for all actors who seek to obtain or protect

their legitimacy, regardless of their (counter-) position in the public sphere. However, while there is widespread agreement on the illegitimacy of antisemitic hate speech, there is more tolerance for negative generalising statements about Muslims and immigrants, which underpins their antagonism towards these groups.

The far right's liberal turn and changed views on Jews

The *far right* is an umbrella term for a variety of political actors, which main common denominator is that they promote a worldview based on nativism, the idea that states should be populated by the native in-group and that alien out-groups pose a threat to the homogenous nation state (Mudde, 2007). While the *extreme* right is profoundly anti-democratic and may support or use violence, the *radical* right operates within a democratic framework but opposes key liberal democratic values, such as political pluralism and minority rights. Another but also partly overlapping distinction can be made between those who see Jews as the main threat and those who are antagonistic to Islam and Muslims. However, the boundaries between ideological camps can be fluid, particularly on digital platforms where different audiences meet.

Considering that far-right ideology historically has been characterised by authoritarianism, it may seem paradoxical that large parts of the far right in Western Europe have taken an ostensibly liberal turn over the last few decades. This is linked to what Berntzen (2020, p. 1) labelled "the anti-Islamic turn and expansion of the far right", in which there has been an ideological transformation where *race* has been replaced by *culture*; Jews have been replaced by Muslims as the predominant enemy, and authoritarianism has been replaced by a "semi-liberal equilibrium", referring to how far-right actors have adopted liberal positions on many issues – such as gender equality and LGBTQ rights – to denounce Islam (Berntzen, 2020). As part of this liberal discourse, far-right actors portray themselves as the true defenders of free speech in a world where this profound democratic freedom is threatened by "the elite", the political left, and political correctness (e.g. Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Moffitt, 2017). Studies have demonstrated how the Muhammad cartoon controversy (Yılmaz, 2011) and the terrorist attack targeting satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (Castelli Gattinara, 2017) functioned as key events used by far-right actors to highlight freedom of expression as a fundamental Western value that is incompatible with Islam. A main argument is that freedom of expression should be as broad as possible – or even absolute (Moffitt, 2017).

Another feature of this ideological development is the changed view of Jews. Historically, hostility towards Jews has been a core feature of far-right ideology. Now, however, it is primarily neo-Nazis who promote antisemitic ideas – most notably conspiracies about Jewish power and Holocaust denial (e.g. Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2021). Following the discredit of antisemitism in the public sphere after the Holocaust, other far-right actors have largely distanced themselves from Nazism and antisemitism to reach a wider audience (Jackson & Feldman, 2014). Some even embrace the Jewish minority, support Israel, and have adopted a critical position towards antisemitism. This "anti-antisemitism" may serve as a way of distancing themselves from Nazism, as well as fending off Muslim immigration, which is claimed to be threatening the security of the Jewish population (Kahmann, 2017). Moreover, support for Israel, Jews and Judaism is often linked to a worldview in which Judeo-Christian values are exalted and equated with Western values that are in conflict with Islam and Muslims (Berntzen, 2020; Kahmann, 2017). Although one can argue that the change in far-right views on Jews is strategic, it may also be a result of genuine ideological differences since the far right is not one unified bloc. The aim here is not to determine the motivations behind this change but rather to scrutinise how an anti-antisemitic editorial position affects how far-right alternative media perceive and perform comment moderation, as well as the arguments used for and against censorship of antisemitism among their audiences, who may or may not share their views.

Audience participation and comment moderation in mainstream and alternative media

Comment sections provide an increased opportunity for citizens to engage in public discussions (Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015) and for interactivity between news producers and their audiences (Larsson, 2011). Facilitation of online debates has, from early on, been motivated by democratic ideals about deliberative participation and by financial incentives (Reich, 2011; Ruiz et al., 2011). While concerns for hate speech and harmful content have led many news organisations to strictly regulate or remove their comment sections, they are still offered by alternative media, but research on the moderation policies and practices of such actors is limited.

Studies on mainstream media have demonstrated that the motivations behind comment moderation may vary. As a way of facilitating democratic discussions, conducting content moderation may be a moral duty. Depending on a country's

legislation, preventing hate may also be a legal obligation (Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Singer et al., 2011). Considering how incivility and hate speech can damage the credibility and commercial interests of actors who facilitate online discussions, handling such content may also be strategically important (Anderson et al., 2016; Reich, 2011). Since alternative media are in opposition to mainstream media, it is not obvious whether these actors feel the same responsibility towards dealing with hate speech. When it comes to far-right alternative media specifically, research has demonstrated that they criticise the established press for being biased, elitist, leftist and politically correct (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019).

When analysing how media actors perceive and perform comment moderation, it is useful to distinguish between interventionist and non-interventionist strategies (Ihlebæk et al., 2013). While an interventionist approach indicates a high level of editorial control and may involve identification requirements and active regulation of content, a non-interventionist approach implies that the media in question perform as little editorial control as possible, based on the ideal of comment sections as a free marketplace of ideas (Løvlie et al., 2018). How these strategies play out in practice is context-dependent, and they should be seen as opposite ends of a continuum rather than two fixed positions. Studies on comment moderation by mainstream media have demonstrated how moderation practices are often based on guidelines that determine what type of content is unwanted and how it should be handled (Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Reich, 2011). A key question for all moderators is where boundaries between the acceptable and unacceptable should be set. Where the boundaries are drawn is likely to vary, depending on the position of the media actors in the public sphere and what they consider uncivil and harmful.

The participating audience may also have different views on where boundaries should be drawn. While the audience of alternative media comprises user groups with different motivations (Schwarzenegger, 2021) who may engage in varying ways (Larsson, 2011), the focus here is on active participants who write comments. Studies on participation and editorial control in mainstream media have highlighted a certain tension between media professionals and audiences concerning questions about the deliberative value, quality and degree of openness in participatory services (Bergström & Wadbring, 2015; Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Robinson, 2010). Although comment moderation is seen as valuable and necessary by many, a study by Løvlie, Ihlebæk and Larsson (2018) showed that commenters who have been moderated are critical of comment moderation, which may be due to lack of transparency in the

moderation process or that those with non-interventionist attitudes also have a tendency towards discussing controversial topics with a confrontational style, lack of digital literacy or understanding of editorial policies.

When it comes to audiences of far-right alternative media, studies have indicated that users are motivated by scepticism and mistrust of mainstream media, particularly regarding news coverage about immigration and Islam (Noppari et al., 2019; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2020). Given that the audience of such media believes that the issues that occupy them are silenced in public, it is not unreasonable to assume that many will support a non-interventionist approach to moderation. Moreover, considering how far-right actors are strong defenders of free speech, comment moderation may be seen as a threat to this freedom.

Data and method

The cases investigated are the three most-read alternative media in Norway, regardless of political leaning: *Resett*, *Document* and *Rights.no* (see Table 1 for an overview of sites and key characteristics). Although the backgrounds for their establishment are different, the sites can be characterised as alternative media due to their self-ascribed oppositional role in the media landscape (Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021). Ideologically, they are similar, focusing particularly on the negative aspects of immigration and Islam. All three sites have published editorials that condemn antisemitism. Within media studies, these types of actors have been labelled "right-wing" or "immigration critical" alternative media (Holt, 2020; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021) or "right-wing digital news" (Heft et al., 2020). Within political sociology, however, such actors are considered to be part of the far right due to their support for nativism and exclusionary views on Islam and Muslims (Berntzen, 2020). Although they might oppose the "far right" label, it is more precise and essential for this study to place them within this ideological landscape.

Site	Established	Weekly readership (%)[1]	Commenting rules	Log-in required for commenting
Document	2003 – as a blog	7	"We do not accept statements that are obviously spam, obscene, racist or that in other ways are a violation of Norwegian law or a minimum of common decency."	Yes
Resett	2017 – as an alternative news site	8	"Dehumanisation, personal attacks, incitement, threats and incitement to violence, war rhetoric, spamming, trolling, complaints about moderation and derailment of the debate are not allowed. Normal courtesy is encouraged."	Yes
Rights.no (Human Rights Service)	2001 – as a think tank	5	"When commenting, you accept our debate rules. We expect a serious debate without personal attacks. HRS reserves the right to moderate and remove inappropriate comments."	Yes

Table 1: Overview of sites and key characteristics

In the Norwegian context, the media actors examined are considered to be controversial and have been the subject of much debate, including how they portray immigrants and Muslims and the lack of regulation in their comment sections (Ihlebæk & Figenschou, 2022; Nygaard, 2020). [2] Concerning regulatory frameworks, it is worth mentioning the Norwegian Media Liability Act, which applies to all media that regularly produce and publish news, debates or other content of public interest. It states that editors may be held responsible for illegal user-generated content (e.g. threats and hate speech), and if the media has rules for user-generated content, they must provide information about the rules

and how they are enforced. The commenting rules of the alternative media under study are presented above (see Table 1). Also relevant is the Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press, which is a self-regulatory framework that is supervised by the Norwegian Press Council (PFU) and applies to members of the Association of Norwegian Editors. Since the editor of *Document* became a member in 2018, they must act accordingly, which implies responsibility for removing user-generated content that is not in compliance with the ethical code.[3] *Resett* and *Rights.no* also claim to follow the Code of Ethics, although they are not formally members of this system.

In the analysis, the aim was to identify the different positions and arguments about comment moderation. To include both editorial and audience perspectives, this study is based on two types of data. First, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the alternative media, including editors and main moderators (N = 5, see Table 2 for an overview).[4] Although the number of interviewees is small, they are considered key informants, as they are the only ones in the Norwegian context who can provide information – from an editorial perspective – on how this type of alternative media perceives and performs comment moderation. The informants were asked about their perceptions of antisemitism in Norway, how they deal with antisemitism in their comment sections, their moderation policies and practices in general and how they perceive freedom of expression in this context. Although the focus was on moderating antisemitic hate speech specifically, it was also an ambition to examine perspectives on comment moderation more generally. Second, the empirical material includes a strategic selection of one comment section from each site that addresses the dilemma of interest. The selected comment sections contain the reactions to the editorials mentioned in the introduction, which have been published on each site. These comments (N = 561) represent the views of active audiences across the sites, which can give insight into whether and how audience perspectives correspond with editorial views. The comments were collected on 10 and 12 May 2021, prior to the interviews, which were conducted in June and July 2021.[5]

Alternative media site	Position of the informant	Interview conducted by
Document	Chief editor	Video call
Resett	Chief editor	Video call
Resett	Head of moderators	Video call
Rights.no	Information manager	Video call
Rights.no	Main moderator	E-mail

Table 2: Overview of informants

Analytically, this study was inspired by the discourse-historical approach (DHA), a variant of critical discourse analysis that is interdisciplinary, problem-oriented and context-oriented and has a special focus on the historical embedding and change of language (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). The DHA was developed to analyse the emergence of antisemitism in public discourses in post-war Austria but is now used to analyse ideology, power and discriminatory language of all kinds. Of particular relevance here is the text or discourse immanent critique, a specific aspect of the DHA that aims to discover inconsistencies, (self)-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in text or discourse. As a first step, the analytical questions proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 32) were adjusted and used to conduct an exploratory close reading of the transcribed interviews and the selected comment sections:

- How are freedom of expression and antisemitism referred to separately and in relation to each other?
- What characteristics are attributed to freedom of expression and (censorship of) antisemitism, respectively?
- What arguments are employed?
- From what perspective are the arguments expressed?
- Are the statements articulated explicitly or implicitly?

The questions served as guidelines to identify the different positions and arguments used regarding the dilemma between (absolute) freedom of expression and censorship of antisemitism.

Subsequently, the interviews and comment sections were coded using the NVivo software for qualitative research. For both types of data, the coding process was hermeneutic and recursive, and the categorisation of positions and arguments was informed by previous research addressing the liberal turn of far-right ideology, perspectives on why and how mainstream media organisations perform comment moderation and the tensions that may arise between facilitators and participants in online debates. The overall aim was to disclose whether editorial perspectives and audience perspectives, respectively, correspond with an interventionist or a non-interventionist approach to comment moderation and whether and how the arguments for and against comment moderation comprise normative, strategic or legal considerations. Another overall aim was to uncover any inconsistencies, (self)-contradictions or paradoxes that might occur when dealing with and discussing the dilemma in question, both within and across the

alternative media and between their editorial policies and their audiences.

The examples of comments have been translated, cut and in some cases slightly adjusted by the author so the study is in accordance with the Norwegian Personal Data Act and the national ethical guidelines for internet research.

Perspectives on comment moderation in far-right alternative media

The first part of the analysis explores how far-right alternative media perceive and perform comment moderation, based on the perspectives of editorial staff members. The second part examines how audience perspectives correspond with editorial views.

Editorial perspectives: Consensus about interventionist strategies

Although they are strong advocates of freedom of expression, there is consensus among the editorial staff that comment moderation is necessary. This applies to antisemitic hate speech specifically but also to other types of harmful content. The arguments for why comment moderation is important and details on how it is practised are presented below.

The importance of comment moderation

In general, the editorial staff of the alternative media perceive freedom of expression to be restricted – in Norwegian society and in the media system. A key aim is to contribute to a more open public debate, particularly regarding topics such as immigration and Islam. When asked about the significance of comment sections, the arguments were similar across all three sites: they want to facilitate enlightening discussions and have a platform where many different voices can be heard, and some explicitly referred to how online debates have become an essential part of democracy. The information manager of *Rights.no* stated that it is "very important that people who feel powerless as citizens have arenas where they can express themselves". The chief editor of *Document* criticised mainstream media for "failing its task" by closing their comment sections. This illustrates how these actors consider the facilitation of online discussions a social responsibility that the established media do not take seriously enough.

Despite concerns about limited freedom of expression, no editorial staff members argued that it should be absolute, at least not in the context of dealing with unwanted and harmful content – such as antisemitism – in their comment sections. An overall finding

is that the alternative media believe that they have a responsibility to conduct comment moderation, thus supporting interventionist strategies. The following quote from the main moderator of *Resett* illustrates this point: "I very much protect freedom of speech. But we have no obligation to publish." Reflecting on how the dilemma between advocating for free speech and conducting moderation plays out on their platforms, she added, "I might say that I do not exactly protect it [free speech] in our comment sections". The interviews also revealed that while *Resett* used to have what was described by the editor-in-chief as a "more idealistic approach", both when it came to publishing a wide range of opinions and allowing "as much as possible" in the comment sections "as long as it was within the law", in August 2019 they decided to regulate comment sections to a much greater extent. This illustrates a shift in *Resett*'s editorial line from a non-interventionist to an interventionist approach. As discussed in more detail below, this change probably reflects the need to protect their credibility. Also of relevance, although not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, is that *Resett*, around the time of this shift, had applied for membership in the Association of Norwegian Editors and was criticised for their lack of comment moderation (Ihlebæk & Figenschou, 2022).

Echoing studies on why mainstream media perform comment moderation, the arguments put forward by the representatives of the alternative media in question varied between normative, legal, and strategic considerations. Those who argued for comment moderation as a moral obligation emphasised the importance of preventing incivility and hate in society. A representative from *Rights.no* stated that they "do not want to be a place where people can spread hate and vulgarity", and for them, antisemitism and racial discrimination "have nothing to do with free speech". The main moderator of *Resett* emphasised that they have a great responsibility to help "combat the Jew-hatred that has arisen", which she claimed was especially salient in Muslim communities. Although no one saw this as a particular concern in the comment sections, the argument about Muslim antisemitism as a significant problem was also mentioned by other informants throughout the interviews, which demonstrates how discussions about antisemitism substantiate their opposition towards Islam and Muslims.

The editor-in-chief of *Resett* focused more on strategic reasons for conducting moderation. In addition to briefly mentioning a legal responsibility and consideration for targeted individuals, he argued that it is mainly about "the reputation and image the public has of *Resett*". Feedback from readers and the fact that people identify the

comment sections with their editorial line meant that the "idealistic" approach to moderation was no longer sustainable. The chief editor emphasised how their idealistic approach and view on free speech had a negative impact on their readership and finances and added, "We do not get around the fact that the comment sections must be handled". The arguments put forward by the chief editor of *Document* were also about strategic considerations. He emphasised how they are "bearing the costs" when people write antisemitic or other types of harmful comments. As an example, he highlighted how "unpleasant" it was when it became publicly known that extreme-right terrorist Anders Behring Breivik had posted comments on their site. Moreover, since becoming a member of professional press associations, it is important for *Document* to act in accordance with their ideals, which means that dealing with harmful comments is necessary (see Ihlebæk & Figenschou, 2022).

Overall, this shows that despite a previous tension between the alternative media, there is now editorial consensus concerning how they perceive comment moderation, as they all expressed support for interventionist strategies. The next section provides details on what this approach entails when it comes to moderation of antisemitic hate speech specifically, as well as other types of content.

Policies and practices

Like mainstream media, the alternative media investigated have moderators who follow the comment sections closely to deal with unwanted and harmful content. Their moderation practices are informed by guidelines that are similar across the sites. Examples of what was claimed to be unacceptable include threats, unreasonable personal attacks, harassment, spam, and racism and hate speech against groups. Speaking in more general terms, the editor-in-chief of *Document* stressed, "We want people to think before they write and express themselves in a civilised language". When asked about antisemitism in the comment sections, the interviewees acknowledged that it may occur, albeit to varying degrees, and emphasised that it is unacceptable to promote antisemitic ideas on their platforms. The most common practice when someone breaks the rules is to not approve comments for publication (on the websites) or to hide or delete comments (on Facebook). If someone crosses the line several times, they may be blocked.

When asked whether it is difficult to know where the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate content should be drawn, the interviewees recognised this as a recurring challenge. When asked specifically about antisemitism in this context, the informants said

that it is not particularly difficult to assess, even if it may be characterised by coded language or if the antisemitic message appears as an underlying idea. The informants expressed no tolerance for any statements that may be perceived as antisemitic. Such statements may, for instance, be conspiratorial ideas about Jewish power or someone questioning whether the Holocaust happened. The chief editor of *Resett* emphasised that since they rejected their "idealistic" approach, they now have "zero tolerance" for antisemitism. The chief editor of *Document* characterised antisemitism as "sui generis", something so unique that there is no doubt about where "the red line" goes. In cases of doubt, the interviewees stated that it is better to delete such comments than to let them be. In sum, this indicates a relatively strict regulation of comment sections, particularly regarding statements that may be perceived as discriminatory or hostile towards Jews. It also shows how these actors can function as efficient gatekeepers who may contribute to the prevention of antisemitism in the digital public sphere.

Probing into the question of difficult boundaries, the interviews further disclosed that the argumentation is different when it comes to comments about other minorities. Despite having guidelines that define racism and hate speech against (all) specific groups as illegitimate, the editorial staff members expressed ambivalence and more tolerance regarding generalisations about immigrants and Muslims. To illustrate, the chief editor of *Resett* claimed, on the one hand, that they have become less tolerant when it comes to how Islam and Muslims are referred to in the comment sections, as it may be "difficult to distinguish between criticism of Islam and criticism of Muslims". While criticism of Islam is considered legitimate, criticism of Muslims is, in principle, illegitimate. On the other hand, he also expressed ambiguity about whether this distinction really makes sense. The chief editor of *Document* similarly described it as "meaningless" to draw a specific line on what you can say when it comes to "the conflict between the West/Europe and Islam". The information manager of *Rights.no* mentioned generalising allegations about Somalis as examples of comments they sometimes let through because "statistically, there are big problems among Somalis" and "not everyone is very good at making reservations" when writing a comment. Although the editorial line of the alternative media is based on an interventionist approach to comment moderation where all forms of hate speech are prohibited, this illustrates that their policies and practices are not consistent, particularly regarding groups that they are antagonistic towards.

Audience perspectives: Conflicting views on comment moderation

Regarding how audience members perceive the dilemma between free speech and censorship of antisemitism, an overall distinction can be made between those who believe that freedom of expression should have certain limits, which means that interventionist moderation strategies are considered necessary, and those who argue for unlimited freedom of expression and thus are critical of comment moderation. Both positions exist within and across the comment sections of the alternative media under study, which means that all three sites have been subject to praise and criticism for how they handle their comment sections. The arguments for and against comment moderation are presented next. Since the latter was more salient, these arguments are given more space.

Arguments for comment moderation

The supporters of an interventionist approach believe that freedom of expression is of major importance but maintain that it should have certain restrictions. The discussions include arguments that refer to the dilemma between freedom of expression and opposition to antisemitism in general and what it means for how online debates should be handled particularly. Many of these commenters have argued from a normative perspective in which antisemitism and Holocaust denial are considered illegitimate, evil, and harmful to society. The main argument is that certain types of political views should not be accepted, even within the framework of wide freedom of expression, and that antisemitism and Holocaust denial are clear examples of the unacceptable. The following statement illustrates this point: "We will stand on the barricades for freedom of expression, but that does not include defending hatred and lies." Other commenters have emphasised that "Jew-haters, whether Islamists or Nazis, do not belong in civilised societies" and that antisemites and Holocaust deniers are "on the sideline" of what free speech is about. Consequently, they disqualify themselves from debates and should not be allowed to express themselves in the comment sections.

Another common argument is that the alternative media have no obligation to publish extreme voices, conspiracy theories or statements that contradict well-documented facts, such as the systematic killing of Jews during World War II. As one commenter has put it: "No one is entitled to have unhistorical chatter published" because it is up to the editor-in-chief of any news outlet to decide what to publish, and "that is how freedom of expression works". Another debater has similarly stated that criticising *Resett*

for inviting right-wing extremists to debates is "not to gag freedom of expression, but rather to use it". In this context, some have stressed that those who promote antisemitic and neo-Nazi views are free to establish their own platforms. Moreover, among those who believe that comment moderation is necessary, some explicitly argue from a strategic point of view. For instance, one commenter urged not to let "these people destroy the alternative media so that they end up as unreadable, poisoned sites for extremists", which is claimed to be "the highest wish" among the political left and "old media". Other commenters have referred to the acceptance of antisemitism in the comment sections as "too including" and as "self-harm". Overall, this indicates an agreement between the editorial line of the alternative media in question and parts of their audiences regarding how they perceive comment moderation, especially when removing antisemitic content. However, many audience members were also highly critical of comment moderation. Their arguments are presented next.

Arguments against comment moderation

The supporters of a non-interventionist approach argue for freedom of expression as a fundamentally important liberal principle, which should be (almost) absolute and limited only in cases of threats or incitement to violence. Consequently, the non-interventionists across all alternative media sites have expressed support for how *Resett* performed comment moderation before tightening the rules. In addition to the overarching main argument about the value of absolute free speech, these debaters argue for the importance of an open debate and point to the risk associated with blurry boundaries, which can backfire if freedom of expression is restricted.

In discussions on whether antisemitic or neo-Nazi beliefs should be allowed in the comment sections, those who support the non-interventionist position emphasise the value of exposing different opinions, no matter how incorrect or illegitimate they are. A common statement in this regard is that "we should not censor voices we do not like". The main argument is that debate and counterarguments are better than censorship and no-platforming, which are considered undemocratic and illiberal measures. In this context, some commenters expressed concern about extreme voices moving to closed platforms, where they would not meet any resistance. A recurring argument is that it is bad to censor conspiratorial and "paranoid" people because then they get their worldview confirmed. In a worst-case scenario, censorship can lead to something that is "more dangerous". Other commenters argued that by allowing and exposing antisemites and Holocaust deniers in

the comment sections, it is likely that more people will become aware of what these actors stand for, and as a result, those who promote such illegitimate ideas make themselves irrelevant. As one commenter has put it: "Idiotic things like Holocaust denial cannot stand the light of day."

A closer look at the arguments against censorship of comments revealed that these audience members are worried about what restrictions on freedom of expression may lead to – for society in general and for the alternative media actors in question. Many asked rhetorical questions about where the boundaries should be drawn and emphasised that it can be difficult to distinguish between hate speech (as defined by law) and criticism of religion – both in the case of Jews and Judaism and in the case of Muslims and Islam. A key argument is that it should be legitimate to criticise all religions and ethnic groups, including Jews, which the editorial line of the alternative media in question does not allow for. As for Holocaust denial, several debaters have pointed out that it should be legitimate to ask questions, even if it is a well-documented historical event – and a "problematic opinion". The following comment illustrates this point: "If a specific topic gets special treatment, it becomes a slippery slope argument." The overall message of the non-interventionists is that true freedom of speech can be achieved only if everyone can express their views on all types of issues.

These audience members further stressed that the arguments used in defence of comment moderation and censorship of antisemitism can just as easily be used by political opponents, mainstream media and the general public to silence alternative media and the people who share their views, particularly on issues such as Islam, immigration and racism. Commenting on the arguments used by *Document* in favour of comment moderation, one debater claimed, "You're shooting yourself in the foot – with a shotgun". Another commenter criticised *Rights.no* for their position on the issue by stating, "You are now using the same rhetoric as your opponents in the mainstream public". An overarching argument is that there is a serious risk of hate speech legislation being abused, since "many people want criticism of Islam and the questioning of mass immigration to be illegal". Consequently, these debaters argued that an interventionist approach to comment moderation will backfire and that the comment sections should be as open as possible with little or no editorial control.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that while the non-interventionists in the comment sections of *Document* and *Rights.no* show little tolerance for antisemitism and Holocaust denial, some of those who defended free speech in the comment section of *Resett* (before they changed the rules) did so because they also supported antisemitic

views. A meta debate about Jews and Judaism has also triggered conspiratorial ideas about Jewish power and influence in media and society at large. Some of these commenters questioned why it is illegal or illegitimate to "criticise" Jews, implicitly or explicitly arguing that powerful Jews are suppressing freedom of expression. Others have claimed that Jews undermine society by being responsible for "mass immigration" and "multiculturalism", which is a common antisemitic trope among neo-Nazis. Consequently, this illustrates that a non-interventionist approach to comment moderation can attract and facilitate debaters who promote antisemitic and extremist views.

Conclusion

While comment sections certainly provide an increased opportunity for people to engage in public discussions and for interactivity between news producers and their audiences, they also pose a challenge to facilitators of such debates. This study has explored how far-right alternative media perceive and perform comment moderation and how audience perspectives correspond with editorial views. Taking the dilemma between two important but conflicting values – defence of freedom of expression and opposition to antisemitism – as a point of departure, the study has contributed with new insights into the positions and arguments used in debates about comment moderation across and within alternative media, which, in recent years, has influenced the digital public sphere (Holt, 2020; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, 2021).

Despite being strong defenders of freedom of expression, which they believe is restricted in media and society, the editorial staff of the alternative media acknowledged that comment moderation is necessary. Mostly reflecting normative or strategic considerations, their arguments were similar to how mainstream media perceives the responsibility for handling online debates (Anderson et al., 2016; Ihlebæk et al., 2013; Ihlebæk & Krumsvik, 2015; Singer et al., 2011). This article has thus argued that when it comes to regulating comment sections, these oppositional media actors are not so alternative after all. The findings illustrate that comment moderation is crucial for all actors who seek to obtain or protect their legitimacy, regardless of their (counter-) position in the public sphere. The wish to be taken seriously and to gain influence and legitimacy were also important motivations when two of the sites examined, *Document* and *Resett*, applied for membership in the Association of Norwegian Editors in 2018, thus seeking insider

status in the professional media landscape (see Ihlebæk & Figenschou, 2022).

The main question is thus not whether interventions should happen at all but rather where the boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable should be set. In the digital public sphere, negotiations of boundaries may take place on different levels – for instance, between the editorial line of the media in question and the wider public, between media actors and their loyal audiences and among different audience members. This study has shown that while there is a general agreement on the need for censoring violent rhetoric, which can be important to create distance to and prevent extremism, questions of what constitutes transgressive hate speech and how it should be handled have raised discussions and dilemmas. When it comes to antisemitism specifically, both editorial staff and most audience members described it as unacceptable. This points to a widespread agreement in the public sphere about antisemitism as a marker of a particularly illegitimate and harmful political stance, even among actors who criticise the media and the public discourse for being narrow and biased. Considering how the editorial staff expressed zero tolerance for any statements that may be perceived as antagonistic towards Jews, the study indicates how these alternative media can function as important and efficient gatekeepers for counteracting antisemitic hate speech, which appears to be increasing in the digital public sphere (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). However, the removal of such content may cause dissatisfaction among their most active audience members since many of them emphasised freedom of expression as a more important value.

Regarding other types of discriminatory content, the study has demonstrated how the boundaries are blurrier. Although their guidelines prohibit all forms of hate speech, the editorial staff across all sites expressed more tolerance for negative, generalising comments about Muslims and immigrants. Furthermore, the argument about the importance of "criticising" Islam, Muslims and (mass) immigration occurred repeatedly among commenters. This points to a common understanding between the editorial line of the alternative media and their audiences concerning the legitimacy of antagonistic statements about these specific out-groups. Considering how prejudice against Muslims is significantly more widespread (34%) in the Norwegian population than prejudice against Jews (8%), allowing anti-Muslim content in the comment sections is probably less risky (Hoffmann & Moe (eds.), 2017).

The present study has some limitations, considering that it covered only a specific subset of alternative media in one country. Future research should investigate perceptions of moderation

policies and practices and the boundaries between the legitimate and the illegitimate across and within alternative media with different ideological leanings and across country-specific (digital) public spheres. Moreover, this study is based on interviews and a selection of comment sections, which means that the findings reflect the expressed views of editorial staff and a subset of the participating audience. Future studies should use other methodological approaches to provide more details on the relationship between policies and practices and to gain insights into the views of the less active audience members. Despite these limitations, this study provides important knowledge about the potential for the diffusion and prevention of different types of hate speech in a rapidly changing digital media landscape.

NOTES

[1] Weekly readership (%) from Newman et al. (2020).

[2] For more on organisational features and these actors' role in the Scandinavian media landscape, see Ihlebæk and Nygaard (2021). To place them within a broader national and transnational ideological context, see Figenschou and Ihlebæk (2019).

[3] See https://presse.no/pfu/etiske-regler/vaer-varsom-plakaten/vvpl-engelsk/. Since 2018, Document has been sanctioned 10 times, five of which were due to a lack of comment moderation. For PFU statistics, see https://presse.no/avansert-sok/?_sft_redaksjon=document-no.

[4] Due to one informant's wish for full anonymity, this interview was conducted by email. It was thus less extensive, and there was limited opportunity for follow-up questions, which probably had an impact on the scope and depth of the information given. The main moderator of *Document* never responded to interview requests.

[5] All of the comment sections were publicly available at the time of data collection.

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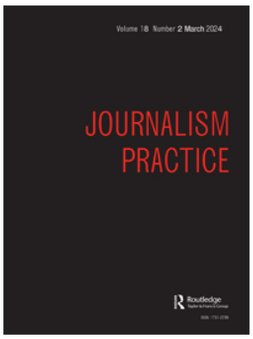

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Overcoming Hate: Jewish Minority Voices' Strategies for Participating in the News Media

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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; Matamoros-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 (Rickenbacher 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 antisemitism. 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 can 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 antisemitism 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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Appendices

Translated interview guide for article 2

Perspectives on antisemitism and editorial policy

To what extent is antisemitism a problem in Norway?

- In what context/where does it come from (e.g., neo-Nazis, Muslims, the left?)

How important is it for you to cover antisemitism as a topic?

Can you say something about the editorial judgements you make when you write about or receive texts about antisemitism or about Jews more generally?

There is an ongoing debate about antisemitism on the left and the boundaries between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. Where do you think the line is between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism?

- Any examples?

How important are the debates about Israel and Palestine to you?

- Why is it important?

Have you ever been accused of antisemitism?

- Where did the criticism/accusations come from? Can you give some examples? How did you react?

Comment sections and comment moderation

I have noticed that [alternative media site] is concerned about and that you have distanced yourself from antisemitism in an editorial you have written/published. I have also seen that there have been some discussions about how the comment sections should be moderated.

To what extent is antisemitism a problem in your comment sections?

- Can you give some examples?

Are there particular topics you know can trigger antisemitism in the comments sections?

- Can you give some examples?

What does a typical comment section look like when you write about these topics?

- Examples?

Are there other types of content that you do not want in the comments sections?

- Examples?
- What is the biggest problem, as you see it? Antisemitism vs. other types of unwanted content?

To what extent do you think you have a responsibility to moderate the comments sections?

- Why is it important?

Do you have guidelines for moderating comments?

- Can you say more about the guidelines?
- What kind of debate do you want? What is not allowed?

Do the comment sections follow the editorial line?

- Or is there room for a more open debate?

How do you perform comment moderation?

- By whom? How many?
- How is it done? For example: pre-moderation, counterarguments, deletion?

When moderating: can it be difficult to know where the boundaries are?

- Examples?
- Where is the line between what is legitimate and illegitimate to say about Jews?

What do you do if you are in doubt about the boundaries?

How do you assess these boundaries in relation to freedom of expression?

- Are there limits to freedom of expression? Examples?

What kind of reactions do you get from those who are moderated?

Do you also get reactions from your audience/readers?

- What kind of reactions?
- (What do you think of the reactions?)

[If the informant cannot answer questions about moderation in detail and/or the organisation has several people involved in moderation, ask for the contact information of the moderators]

Do you have any questions for me?

Translated interview guide for article 3

Antisemitism and criticism of Israel: experiences and boundaries

There is an ongoing debate - particularly in the UK - about antisemitism. It is a contentious and difficult issue, and it seems to me that in some cases these debates can also be characterised by accusations of antisemitism. I am interested in your thoughts and experiences about the prevalence of antisemitism on the left in Norway, but also about accusations of antisemitism.

In general, what do you think about this in the Norwegian context? To what extent is antisemitism a problem on the Norwegian left (broadly defined)?

- Do you know of environments where it is - or has been - widespread (in recent years)?

Has the issue of antisemitism been discussed in your organisation?

- If so, when? In what context? What was the discussion about?

Are you [the organisation] aware of the line between criticising Israel and antisemitism?

- When did this awareness arise? In what context? For example, events within the organisation, events in other countries, media debates?

Where do you think the boundary between criticism of Israel and antisemitism goes? What is legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel?

Do you have any experience of antisemitism in your organisation?

- Can you give examples?
- What was the reaction?

Have you [the political organisation] ever been accused of antisemitism?

- Where did the criticism/accusations come from? What was it about? Can you give some examples?
- Did this lead to changes in your organisation? If so, what kind of changes?

Online debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, antisemitism, and the role as moderator

It is often argued that comment sections and social media are an important arena for the spread of antisemitism today. I would therefore like to ask you some questions about your presence and use of the internet and social media, and how you deal with potentially heated and controversial online debates related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on your digital platforms.

First of all: Do you think it is in the debates about Israel and Palestine that the issue of antisemitism is most relevant? Or are there other topics you are concerned with that could also trigger antisemitic speech?

What does a typical comment section look like when you write about Israel in general or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular?

- Are there often heated debates on Facebook? What about on your website?
- Who participates? Are there participants from “both sides”?
- What triggers such debates?

To what extent do you consider antisemitic speech to be a problem in online debates about Israel and Palestine?

- Primarily on Facebook or on websites? Or both (if relevant)?
- Can you give examples?
- In what context? What triggers such statements?

Furthermore, I have some questions about how you moderate your digital platforms, both your website and social media.

First of all: What do you consider to be the most important digital platform?

- To reach out to the public and possibly create debate?

How do you consider your responsibility to moderate comments? (And why?)

Do you have guidelines and routines for moderating comments?

- Are they open and easily accessible?
- On Facebook and the website? Where?

What kind of moderation routines do you have?

- Who moderates?
- When and how?

How familiar are you with Facebook's different moderation tools?

What tools do you use to moderate discussion on Facebook?

- Pre-filtering? Deleting comments? Do you hide comments?
- If you use pre-filtering, which words?

And what about the comment sections on the website? What moderation options do you have there (if any)?

Do you take an active part in the debate?

- For example, by providing factual information, clarifying your position on the issue, or pointing out that a particular behaviour/expression is not acceptable?

Finally, I would like to discuss a few examples from your comment sections. What do you think of this [practical task: example(s) of a Facebook post and anonymised extract from the comment section]?

Do you have any questions for me, or would you like to add anything?

Translated interview guide for article 4

Background information and general perspectives on antisemitism in Norway

First of all: What year were you born?

To what extent do you think antisemitism is a problem in Norway today?

- Why and in what context is it (most) prevalent?
- Do you have examples of someone saying or publishing something antisemitic in public?

Do you think there is more or less antisemitism today than ten years ago?

- If more: Why? Because of the internet?

What is your impression of the extent of antisemitism online?

- Have you observed it, and if so, where?
- Do you have the impression that it is primarily linked to/comes from certain communities, or is it "everywhere"?

There are sometimes controversies in the public sphere that lead to meta-debates about antisemitism and the boundaries of what can and cannot be said about Jews. [Explain a bit more if the informant has not already mentioned relevant examples, e.g., the "Jødesvin" skit or the NRK radio presenter who criticised Israel's vaccination programme].

How do you feel when these boundaries are discussed?

What did you think of the "Jødesvin" skit and the debate that followed?

Do you feel differently when NRK [the national broadcaster] crosses the line than when it happens in other contexts, for example on the internet or in alternative media?

Participation in the public sphere and experiences of antisemitism

[Short introduction about why the informant was recruited: open about their Jewish identity or background + active in public debate or otherwise visible in the media].

Do you have much experience participating in public debate/being visible in the media/public sphere?

- Since when? Is it possible to estimate how long/number of years?

When and in what context have you participated in public debate/been visible in the media?

- Can you give some examples of the types of debates/issues you have been involved in?
- On behalf of yourself or as a representative of an organisation?

Why have you engaged in the debate(s)/issue(s)?

Have you ever been in doubt about whether you should publicly talk about a topic/debate/issue?

- Why were you in doubt?
- Did you have any expectations about what kind of reactions you would get? What kind of expectations?

- Did you have any strategies to protect yourself from unwanted negative attention?

Are there topics or debates that you are passionate/care about, but that you have avoided or are reluctant to talk about?

- Why is that?
- What makes it particularly difficult?

What kind of reactions have you received when you have participated in public debate and been open about your Jewish identity/background?

- Positive? Negative: From whom and what was it about? How did it affect you?

Where did you experience these reactions?

Do you read the comments sections under articles/issues where you are mentioned?

- If yes: Why? And what is it like for you?
- If no: Why not?

Have you experienced antisemitism because of your participation in the public debate/visibility in the public/media?

- Does it happen often?

Can you tell me more about it? When, in what context and what happened?

- Can you give some typical/more specific examples?
- Was it directed at you as an individual or was it about Jews in general?
- Where did you experience this? Online and/or in the real world?
- If online, on what platforms (e.g., comments, social media, email)? Public/private?
- Do you know who was behind it/who the sender was?

Did you find it easy or difficult to categorise it as antisemitism?

Do you have examples of situations where you were in doubt about whether something was antisemitic? Why were you in doubt?

Have you found that others have perceived it differently from you?

- How does that make you feel?

<u>Consequences</u>

To what extent have these experiences/experiences of antisemitism affected you?

How has it affected you?

- Emotionally
- If applicable: Safety measures?

Further participation in public debate/visibility in the media: withdrawal or continued participation?

- Have you ever been in doubt about whether it was the right decision?

Any change in digital practices?

- Are you less available on social media now?
- Have you stopped reading comments sections?

Do you experience it differently when it happens online than when it happens “in the real world”? In what way?

What do you think are good measures to combat antisemitism in Norway today?